

THOMAS FRANK ON TV'S D.C. FANTASIES

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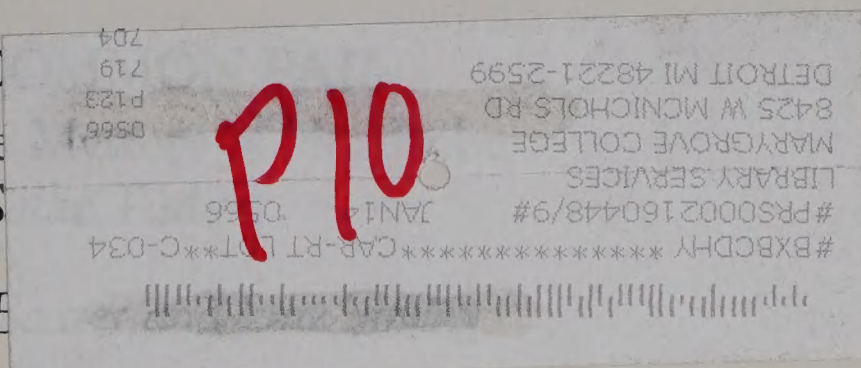
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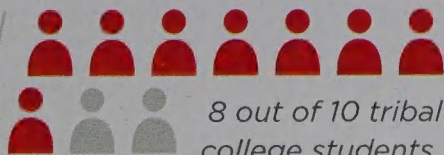
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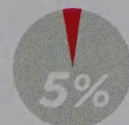
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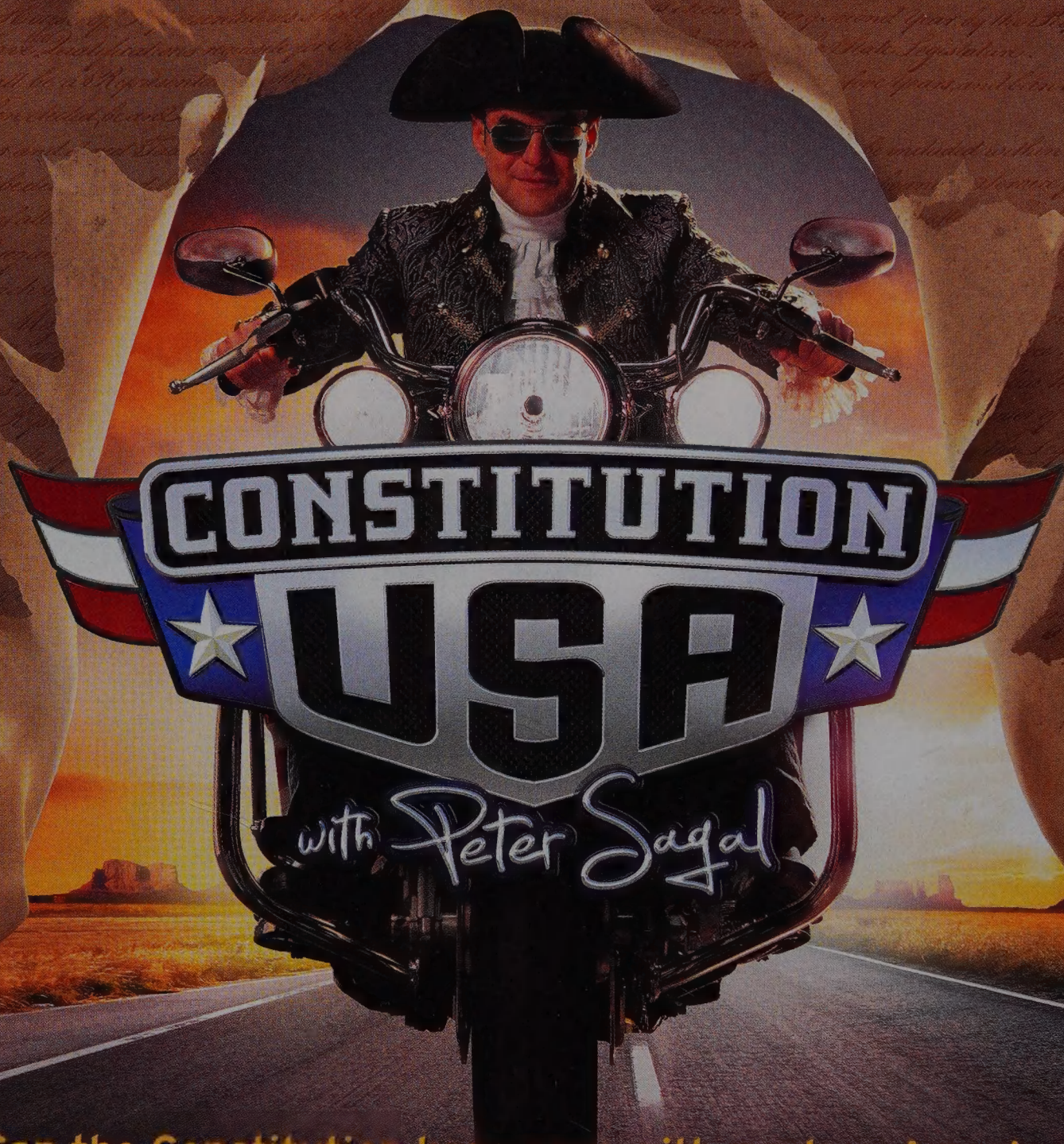


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Cover: Interior with Meat, a painting
by Alex Kanevsky, whose work was on
view in October at J. Cacciola Gallery, in
New York City. Courtesy the artist and
J. Cacciola Gallery, New York City.

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LETTERS

All's Well That Ends Wells

In his report on the fracking boom in North Dakota ["Bakken Business," Letter from Elkhorn Ranch, March], Richard Manning fails to mention the rapid falloff in the output of fracked wells—often as much as 80 percent over two years. The industry must constantly drill new wells to keep up production. The 673,000 barrels produced daily in the Bakken in January of this year required more than 4,500 wells. To maintain that level, another 699 wells must be drilled next year, but there are plans for many more than that. At a certain point, diminishing returns set in; the Canadian energy geoscientist David Hughes gives the Bakken bubble ten years before it bursts. Saudi America this is not.

Ando Arike

Brooklyn

Manning uncritically repeats observations made by a delegation from the North Dakota Wildlife Society that visited several drilling sites in 2011 and claimed to have found evidence that reserve-pit water had contaminated the Missouri River. But according to an internal Department of Health investigation, no drilling

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sites discharged into the Missouri River that year. Snowmelt inundated the well pad at one site, but the reserve-pit water that drained off the pad was contained on adjacent fields.

Last April, the North Dakota Department of Mineral Resources put into effect twenty-six changes to the rules regulating oil activity, addressing some of the concerns the Wildlife Society raised in its report, and the state legislature is considering bills focusing on other environmental concerns this session. We remain committed to enforcing laws and regulations that protect our environment.

Lynn Helms

Director, North Dakota Department of Mineral Resources

Dave Glatt

Chief, Environmental Health Section, North Dakota Department of Health Bismarck, N.D.

Richard Manning responds:

The government's attempt to focus the discussion on a single well misses the forest for the trees—and this is no accident. Environmentalists and regulators alike appear most comfortable with a debate over which chemicals leaked at a single well among the state's 8,000. But the real story is the carbon in our atmosphere. Perfect regulations and perfect enforcement by regulators would do little to prevent us from cooking the planet, or for that matter from leaving the landscape and communities of North Dakota sadly reduced.

Mission Admonished

In his letter to Paul Wolfowitz on the tenth anniversary of the Iraq war [Miscellany, March], Andrew J. Bacevich claims that Wolfowitz, like his mentor Albert Wohlstetter, is fundamentally a pragmatist and not an ideologue. This is a false distinction, as Bacevich's own analysis reveals. All the ingredients of ideology are present: the preference for preventive war that stems from a belief in American "dominion"; the goal of "unquestioned supremacy" for the United States; the pursuit of global hegemony "for [America's] own good as well as for the world's"; and "the imperative of claiming for the United States prerogatives allowed no other nation." Bacevich is essentially describing American exceptionalism and, as the Kennedy School's John Ruggie has added, exemptionalism—ideology, pure and simple. Though Wolfowitz's actions were persistently justified with the doctrine of pragmatism, this ideology has long been the philosophical argument for American military intervention.

Mel Gurtov
Portland, Ore.

Up In Arms

The desperation to identify a convenient rationale for the serious problem of gun violence in America is evident in Thomas Frank's invective against the film industry ["Blood Sport," Easy Chair, March]. But Frank fails to recognize that gory movies are a symptom rather than a cause of our appetite for mayhem. We are all of us "lost in some sanguinary fantasy"—the murderous sense of entitlement with which we so easily embark on homicidal forays into those Vietnams and Iraqs and Afghanistans whose atrocities faze us hardly at all. We cannot eliminate the part of our violent nature that horrifies us at Sandy Hook without also eliminating the part that fails to

horrify us abroad. When we blithely designate any village on earth an American battlefield, something comparably monstrous is bound to crop up here at home.

Michael Moore
Oracle, Ariz.

Corrections

"Bakken Business" incorrectly states that oil wells are optimally spaced two to three miles apart. This is in fact the

optimal spacing for well pads, which can contain up to twenty-four wells.

"Only Connect" [Whitney Terrell and Shannon Jackson, Annotation, April] incorrectly states that the municipal governments of Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, provide offices, meeting spaces, and showrooms to Google free of charge. The space the company maintains in city-owned buildings is indeed free; its other local facilities are privately rented.

We regret the errors.

Paul Fredrick

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EASY CHAIR

Power Rangers
By Thomas Frank

What, then, is the Washingtonian, this smug and satisfied man? Behold him as he ambles toward you on the sidewalks of Capitol Hill, phone clamped to his ear, talking loudly so that all might know his significance. Note well his blue suit, blue tie, the lapel pin announcing his patriotism or his lofty elected position or his allegiance to one trade association or another. What manner of man is he?

The makers of our TV shows think they know. In 1999, they gave us *The West Wing*, a beloved program about a culture-warring president and his gang of jaded aides who, though they harbor no illusions, try to do what is right for the country. The show was a fantasy of what liberals hoped the powerful were like—as Bill Clinton reportedly said in 2000, it was “renewing people’s faith in public service.”

Today TV knows something else about Washington. The trust of the American people in their leaders is now at a record low. In truth, it has been in the dumps for decades; it collapsed during the Vietnam War, and, despite fluctuations over the years, has never really recovered. Disgust hit a new high after the debt-ceiling debacle of 2011, when fully 86 percent of Americans told pollsters they felt “angry” or “frustrated” about the federal government—the worst result on record. And this is no doubt what accounts for the caustic new crop of Beltway soap operas, seemingly designed to dynamite faith in Washington rather than renew it.

Political cynicism as a form of entertainment is nothing new, of course. And viewers have long been able to choose from an extensive selection. There’s Sixties-style suspicion of the Pentagon, for example, or Seventies-style suspicion of busing and the EPA.

But what distinguishes the current offerings is that they invite you to scoff for no reason at all. This new cynicism is largely unrelated to American politics—indeed, much of it is imported wholesale from other countries. It seems a thing not of populist rage but of focus groups and algorithms, and its distrust of government is almost completely abstract.¹

From *Scandal*, the hit ABC series about a high-powered D.C. fixer, one expects better. After all, it is based on the real-life experiences of Judy Smith, who served George Bush the Elder as deputy press secretary and helped sell the country on Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas.

Unfortunately, Season 1 of *Scandal* turns out to deal pretty much exclusively with sex scandals—plus more sex scandals, followed by sex-related fallout. The main thread concerns a lowly White House staffer who has had an affair with the president, or at least claims she has. Should this dalliance become known to the public, we are assured, it would compel the president’s immediate resignation. No need for lies told to grand juries or any such complexities: You screws, you lose.

The show’s central character, who is herself having an intermittent affair with the president, is one Olivia Pope, principal of a crisis-management consultancy. Her associates include ace lawyers, a former CIA agent who can hack into anything, and various other vaguely brilliant people. Pope, played

by Kerry Washington, is supposed to be a phenomenal image wrangler and a healer of damaged souls.

Pope’s main superpower is her “gut.” This faculty, she informs us in the first episode, “tells me everything I need to know.” I had hoped that invocations of the intestinal infallibility of D.C. figures might cease forever after the gut-directed disasters of the George W. Bush Administration. Perhaps Olivia Pope is allowed to revive the cliché because her other power steers her in the opposite direction, toward extreme rationalism. Which is to say, she can talk really rapidly, which makes whatever she is saying seem highly persuasive.

Olivia Pope’s firm is supposedly modeled after Judy Smith’s, but what it truly resembles is Jack Abramoff’s, which was once regarded as the one-stop shop for all your legislative and media-manipulating needs.² Pope has a superbly Abramoffian moment when she first terrifies the president’s rumored love interest—threatening to out the staffer for her multiple sexual partners, her mother’s mental illness, and “that ugly bout of gonorrhea”—and then, a little later, signs her up as a client.

Alas, the similarities end there. *Scandal* gives us scandal after scandal while scarcely mentioning, say, lobbyists or defense contractors. We never even see Pope get paid, let alone funnel checks through a steeplechase of shell corporations and phony think tanks. No, in standard TV fashion,

¹ Netflix, which produced one of the shows discussed below, actually chose its director and star by analyzing user data. “Through our algorithms,” declared one Netflix executive, “we can determine who might be interested in Kevin Spacey or political drama.”

² Along with coproducing *Scandal*, Smith runs a crisis-management firm in Washington whose clients have included Monica Lewinsky and Michael Vick. She is also the author of *Good Self, Bad Self: Transforming Your Worst Qualities into Your Biggest Assets*.

"Religion is exactly the same kind of thing as astrology."

—A. C. Grayling

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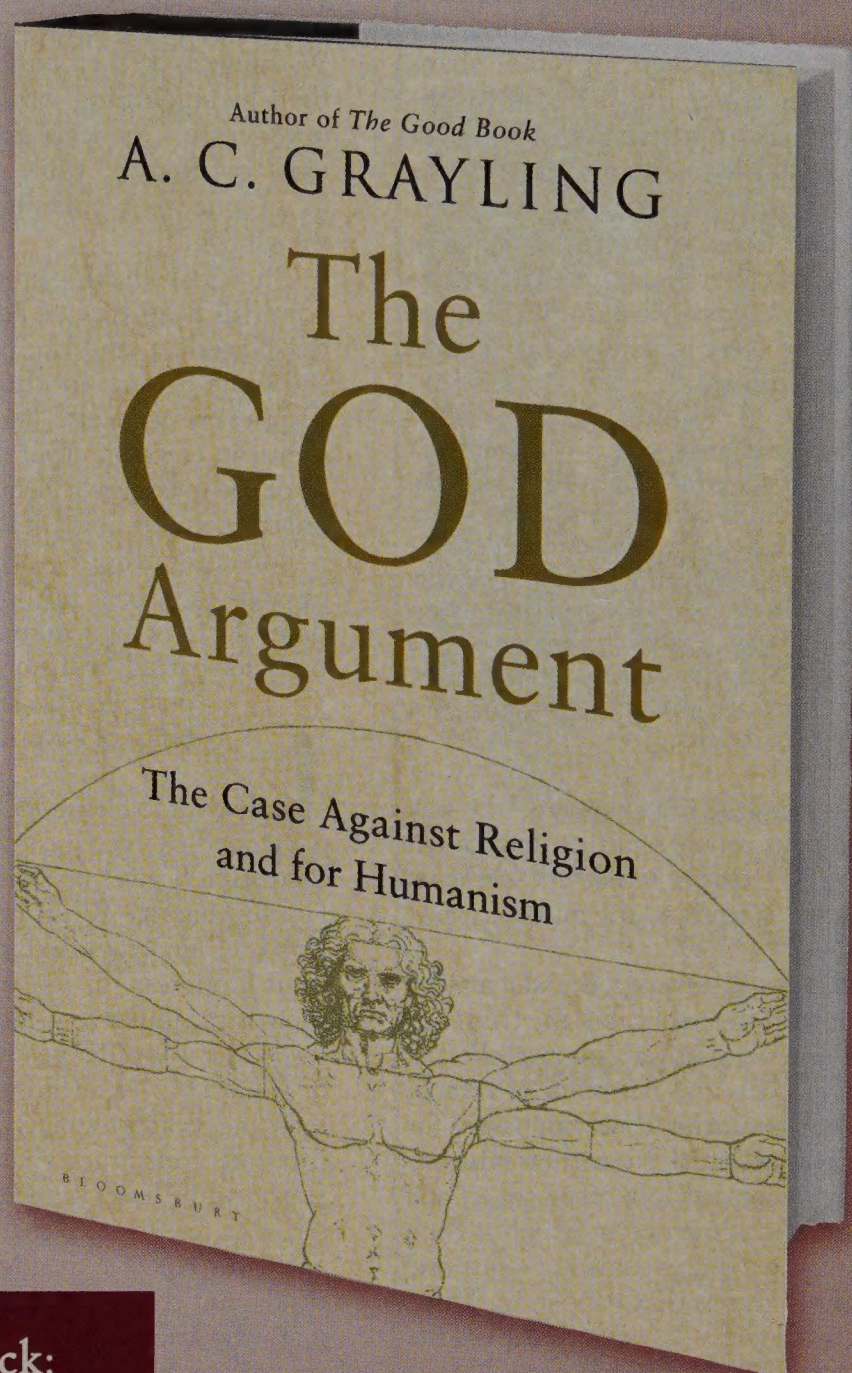
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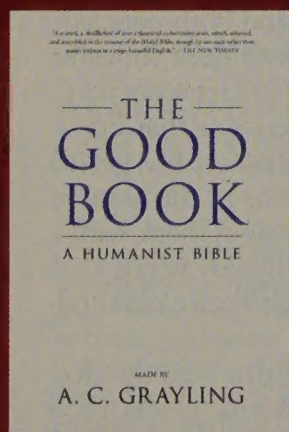
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she must wear the white overcoat of moral and political virtue.

And so things generally work out the way they should. The closeted gay man who is wrongly accused of murder is acquitted once he acknowledges his gayness; the prostitute turns out to have a heart of gold; the wife of the monstrous South American tyrant abandons him during a state visit to Washington. As it happens, the defection of this caudillo's wife allows Pope to lay out her political philosophy in some detail. Surprise: it's mostly about the liberating power of celebrity culture! "She seems weak now," says Olivia to the dictator, speaking (very rapidly) of his asylum-seeking spouse:

But she is smart. She is powerful. And smart, powerful women like Carolina, they don't curl up and hide when they've been wounded. They strike back by writing memoirs and appearing on talk shows and at benefits and on red carpets, talking about women's rights in the developing world, and how babies were ripped from her arms by a ruthless dictator.

That's how change happens—by way of famous people strutting down a red carpet while the cameras tape and the millions gape.

This will never do. *Scandal* may be a hit with the public, but the true connoisseur of misgovernment snickers at Olivia Pope and her team of lovable misfits, mounting their campaigns for truth and justice from their whimsically decorated loft office. Even the celebrated sequence in which a Pope employee tortures someone—just one of those things that happen in Washington, I guess—dwells on the sad life experiences of the *torturer*. This is light and fluffy nihilism, less Hunter S. Thompson than Walt Disney.

Veep, starring Julia Louis-Dreyfus as the vice president, does without the torture but nevertheless peers a little deeper into Washington's dark heart. The show is a study in sycophancy (as was its model, the U.K. series *The Thick of It*). *Veep* is also a comedy, and the running joke goes like this: despite all the sucking up by her power-hungry, compulsively flattering associates, the vice president has no power herself. She is incompetent. Her schemes are with-

out fruit. Her gambits always fail. Her boss speaks to her only through a contemptuous emissary, who always takes pains to remind her of her impotence.

What brings on the laffs is watching a cast of operators scream at one another in great swirling spouts of profanity. This is not actually how people in Washington do their business, or even their bad-mouthing. Still, the curses never cease. One legislator calls assistants "gay dwarves," while another refers to an aide as "a gold-plated fucking shit-gibbon."

Oh, it's a rollicking good time. The powerful heap threats and abuse on the powerless, and the powerless do the same to one another. Everyone despises everyone else, and if someone shows an emotion other than hatred, he or she must surely be faking it. The only discernible point of this acid bath in pure misanthropy—other than the obvious industrial purpose of establishing HBO as a manufacturer of no-holds-barred "realism"—is to demonstrate the farcical ignobility of government.

LLeave it to *House of Cards*, a series developed by Netflix, to deliver the hard stuff. It gives us Kevin Spacey as House Majority Whip Frank Underwood, a Democrat working with a fractious Congress. In its structure, the show is so similar to *Scandal* that one suspects it was generated with the help of some D.C.-entertainment master template. Both programs dramatize an intricate conspiracy that persists all season while lesser scandals come and go. Both feature such stock characters as the cub reporter, the high-class prostitute, and the icy wife of a powerful man who knows about his affairs with younger women; both revolve around murders that the authorities have mistaken for suicides; and both conclude their first seasons with deep thoughts about childlessness and reproduction.

The main difference is that Frank Underwood (his initials are FU, get it?) doesn't solve problems in the manner of Olivia Pope. He *causes* them, with a sort of Mephistophelian verve that makes Karl Rove look like a nickel-and-dime artist.

House of Cards begins with the election of a new president. Underwood campaigned for this man and expects to

be rewarded with a high position in the administration. When the job is withheld, he embarks on a preposterously twisted course of revenge, backstabbing and betraying just about everybody he encounters. At one point, in the midst of a Byzantine plot to replace the vice president, he actually kills somebody.

The show's eye for D.C. detail is sometimes sharp: a recurring subplot concerns one of those hypervirtuous nonprofits with which the capital is so well stocked; it seems to be philanthropic, but is in fact neck-deep in politics of the most sordid kind. And the program's gloomy message is underscored by its setting. Almost everything here happens either at night or in some dimly lit interior. Walls are gray, or a dirty sallow color, and the same thing can be said of much of the clothing.

Less effective are the villainous asides Underwood delivers to the camera. Not only is the technique borrowed from Shakespeare, but the language he uses on these occasions is supposed to be high-end stuff, meaning that it usually sounds stilted. ("I have zero tolerance for betrayal, which they will soon indelibly learn," he says at one point, in the manner of a summer-stock Richard III, thereby reminding us that *House of Cards*, too, is a direct adaptation of a British program.)

Along the way, we meet numerous petty tyrants and watch minor characters get fired or have their careers ruined. *House of Cards*, we begin to understand, is a show about bosses, the bossed, and the methods by which members of one group motivate and manipulate members of the other. The leadership techniques of the wicked Underwood boil down to one essential item: blackmail. The way you get people to deliver is by threatening to expose them—it's foolproof, and it transforms the victims into your robots for life.

These shows agree that the human species is at its worst within the confines of the Beltway. They insist that America's leaders are greedy and self-serving; that anything you hear from a person residing in Dupont Circle or Chevy Chase must be treated with the same skepticism you reserve for those desperate emails from dispossessed heirs to Angolan banking fortunes.

Misgovernment is epidemic, of course, and plenty of the episodes in these shows are based on actual events, like the Chandra Levy murder and the "D.C. Madam" prostitution scandal. Still, not one of them manages to diagnose what ails Washington, D.C., or even to touch on the really quintessential scandals of our age. None of them, for example, tries to explain how our bank regulators bungled the financial crisis or how the political class came to believe that the federal deficit is so catastrophic as to require immediate, panic-stricken austerity.

This is not for any lack of cynicism, mind you. The makers of these shows have let their imaginations run in the fields of the Devil; they give us evil big-government characters doing evil big-government things and telling evil big-government lies. They are willing to believe the worst about nearly everyone. So why do they keep missing the real deal?

The answer is that the standard Hollywood vision of corruption has nothing to do with the reality of Washington. Start with the most basic question: Why do people in Washington do the awful things they do? What motivates them? In each of the shows under consideration here (and in many recent movies on the subject as well), this question is seldom addressed head-on. But in *Scandal* and *Veep* and *House of Cards*, the explanation is obvious: They do it for power. Power is its own reward.

By which I mean, power defined in relentlessly individual terms. Forget the grand themes of various real-life scandals—the Abramoff affair or Iran-Contra. The skulduggery on TV is always personal. This nifty worldview allows the TV producers to do neat things like avoid partisanship and import plots from abroad, and it also ensures that they will always get reality wrong.

In *House of Cards*, for example, Underwood spends episode after episode working on an education bill that eventually provokes the ire of Marty Spinella, a lobbyist for the teachers' unions. To protest the bill, Spinella initiates a nationwide strike, and Underwood is pressured by the president himself to resolve the situation.

He does so by inviting the lobbyist to a private meeting and insulting him.

"The most you'll ever make of yourself is blowing men like me," Underwood sneers, "men with *real power*." At which point Spinella punches him and Underwood threatens to tell. Thus the huge strike is ended—not because of a vote by the union rank and file or anything, but because the union lobbyist got himself into an awkward situation.³ In this theory of how Washington works, the cart drags the horse all over town.

The reason that this kind of cynicism will always fail to comprehend the misgovernment of our time is that *such misgovernment arises from this kind of cynicism in the first place*. Why were so many essential operations in Iraq and New Orleans outsourced to fly-by-night contractors? Because we knew better than to let government do the job. Why weren't our regulators more clued in when the financial crisis erupted? Because we had figured out that government supervision was little more than red tape, and so we turned regulation over to market actors themselves.

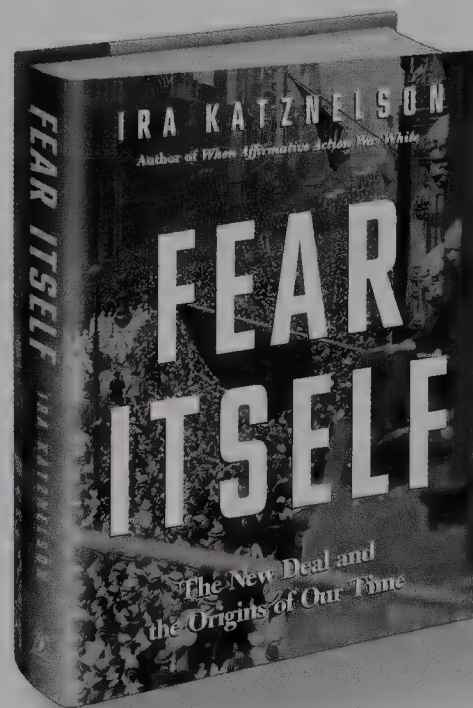
I object to such programs not because I think we should show more respect for Washington, but because cynicism is precious and powerful stuff, not something to be squandered indiscriminately by any ignoramus with an algorithm. Cynicism can be the well-spring of reality and reform. But done like this, it merely feeds the cycle of federal disaster.

On the other hand, there is a city in which all these fantasias of corruption ring perfectly true, a place where bosses are amoral despots who flaunt their power and abuse their underlings, and where people really do think, in their moments of peak idealism, that celebrity culture will save the world. It's just a shame that Hollywood can talk about its problems only by projecting them onto others. ■

³ Although a lobbyist could conceivably play some role in organizing a strike, the idea that he would single-handedly end such a walkout is ludicrous; the decision would be up to union presidents, local leaders, and individual members. Nor would a labor lobbyist's smacking a guy like Underwood constitute blackmail material. On the contrary, it would almost certainly be a point of pride, as it was when John L. Lewis punched the conservative head of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners in 1935, and thereby began the process of forming the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

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KELSEY TIMMERMAN is a freelance journalist and the author of *Where Am I Wearing?* He's spent the night in Castle Dracula in Romania, gone undercover as an underwear buyer in Bangladesh, and taught an island village to play baseball in Honduras. He lives in Muncie, Indiana, with his wife and two children.



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THE ANTI-ECONOMIST

The Age of Cruelty
By Jeff Madrick

Following heavy Democratic losses in the 2010 congressional elections, Barack Obama announced that he was reading a biography of Ronald Reagan to see how the great man had handled his party's whopping 1982 midterm defeat. With the country mired in a deep recession, Republicans had lost twenty-seven seats in the House of Representatives. But Reagan maintained that recovery was around the corner. By the following year, the economy had bounced back and the unemployment rate, which in 1982 averaged nearly 10 percent, had begun falling sharply. Reagan easily won reelection in 1984. Having experienced even greater losses in the House, Obama hoped that Reagan's story would provide a blueprint for his own political recovery—and perhaps it did, since he won reelection more comfortably than many pundits had predicted.

The center-left historian Sean Wilentz has called the period from 1974 to 2008 the Age of Reagan. In his book of that title, Wilentz expresses his grudging admiration for how our fortieth president transformed the nation. "Reagan," writes Wilentz, "embodied a new fusion of deeply conservative politics with some of the rhetoric and even a bit of the spirit of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal and of John F. Kennedy's New Frontier." But this embrace of progressive rhetoric and spirit did not actually reflect Reagan's damaging policies, a fact Wilentz can't help but document. A more accurate name for Wilentz's book—and for the era—might be the Age of Cruelty.

The reverence in which Americans of all political persuasion seem to hold

Reagan today is absurd. As president, he created a phony—if romantic—picture of America's past, a schoolboy's fiction of a country forged by individualism. From this fiction came the dream that we could return to an earlier moral order in which citizens were supposedly freer. Of course, America was in part built by bold individualists, but it was also built by government investment in canals and railroads, in public water and urban sanitation systems, in highways, scientific research, free K–12 education, college subsidies, and a legal system that encouraged competition while protecting private property. If Reagan brought Americans optimism, it was optimism based on false hopes and misleading facts.

Wilentz's Age of Reagan doesn't end with Reagan himself or even his successor, George H. W. Bush, because the revived centrist outlook of the Democratic Party carried Reagan's legacy through the Clinton years. The party's movement toward the center brought with it concessions not only to Reagan but also to Milton Friedman, the right-wing economist whose ideas served as the intellectual buttress to Reagan's *Reader's Digest* ideology. "In many ways Milton Friedman was a devil figure in my youth, [in a] Keynesian household of economists," Clinton treasury secretary Lawrence Summers said in a 2001 interview with PBS.

I grew to see the issue as more nuanced as I was in school and ultimately have come to have enormous respect for Friedman's views on a range of questions. That's a respect that is born of the power of his arguments as one considers them more and more deeply.

Obama's decision to place Summers and other Clintonites at the helm of his first-term economic-policy team was an early indication that his election represented a continuation of Reagan's influence. And this spring's budget debates remind us yet again that the Age of Cruelty continues. As a result of cuts imposed by the sequester, discretionary domestic spending could soon sink to its lowest level as a share of the total economy since the early 1960s, and the burden of these cuts will fall squarely on the poor. While the sequester targets infrastructure, education, and housing expenditures, ongoing budget negotiations will likely cut entitlement programs such as Medicare and Social Security. Taken together, these cuts would reflect an abdication by the government of its responsibility to maintain a decent society. This is Reagan's true legacy, advanced in different ways by every occupant of the White House—Democrat and Republican alike—since his departure almost a quarter century ago.

Reaganite thinking has become so pervasive that it may be difficult to remember an earlier time. As governor of California, Reagan supported a 1973 ballot initiative that would have amended the state constitution to cap income taxes permanently. The measure was voted down by almost ten points. A healthy majority of Californians didn't want their taxes cut, choosing instead to give their government an adequate budget to do its job. Five years later, however, Proposition 13, a similar initiative cutting and capping property taxes, passed overwhelmingly. That same



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year, New York representative Jack Kemp and Delaware senator William Roth proposed cutting federal income taxes by nearly 30 percent. Reagan was not the cause of growing antitax attitudes throughout the 1970s, but he distilled them potently. The Kemp-Roth bill became the model for what Reagan adopted and got passed as president.

This change in sentiment came during a time of soaring inflation. In his final debate with Jimmy Carter before the 1980 election, Reagan said, "We don't have inflation because the people are living too well. We have inflation because the government is living too well." Americans apparently found this thinking convincing. He had given them an easy scapegoat for their growing frustrations: Washington. In the process, he redefined our relationship to our government, making Americans consumers rather than citizens. They paid taxes not to help others, it seemed, but to buy something for themselves. If the individual benefit wasn't apparent, then the money should be withheld.

In his mania for reducing the size of the federal government, Wilentz notes, Reagan proposed slashing spending on public assistance, food stamps, school lunches, and job training, among other programs. Senator Ted Kennedy gathered enough votes in Congress to block some of these proposals, but many got through, and the poor suffered as a result. Reagan fought aggressively against affirmative-action programs, and his Justice Department failed to enforce multiple violations of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Clarence Thomas, his choice to run the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, ignored thousands of complaints of job bias, including age discrimination. He sharply cut the budget of the Environmental Protection Agency, and he aggressively promoted oil and gas exploration on federal lands. His Pentagon was shockingly corrupt, as dozens of procurement scandals proved. He avoided aggressive policies to address the increasingly urgent public-health crisis presented by the AIDS epidemic. The vision of the rugged frontiersman riding bravely into the unknown led to the worst kind of financial deregulation,

allowing savings-and-loan institutions to invest clients' money, most of it federally insured, in almost anything they chose. The industry collapsed, requiring a taxpayer bailout of more than \$150 billion. Even the economic expansion that returned him to office in 1984 and made him a model for Obama was in many respects a failure. While jobs were created, average wages stagnated, and inequality began its steady climb to the levels of the 1920s. Though Reagan argued that reducing taxes was the key to business spending, investment remained weak throughout the decade.

During his presidency, Reagan supported one useful social program that helped the working class: the earned-income tax credit. (Note that this was in the form of a tax rebate, not a government expenditure.) But his primary legacy was an enormous federal budget deficit, which has affected policy decisions ever since. The greater Reagan lie, known as supply-side economics, was that tax revenues would rise sharply enough to reduce the budget deficit Jimmy Carter left us. When Reagan left office, the deficit was about three times Carter's. Few new social programs have been proposed since then, because deficit hawks claim there isn't money to finance them.

If you doubt the harshness of Reagan's policies, remember that George H. W. Bush felt obliged to promise a "kinder, gentler" government than Reagan's in order to get elected. The elder Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act, and he eventually supported a tax increase to close the deficit. Though this tax hike hurt Bush badly in his failed reelection campaign and helped bring Bill Clinton to office, the major achievement of Clinton's own first term was raising income-tax rates on the well-off. This was a solid attack on the Reagan legacy.

But to win reelection in 1996, Clinton made a welfare-reform proposal so severe that even Bob Rubin, his Wall Street-groomed Treasury secretary, opposed it. Reagan had begun preaching about the evils of welfare while running for governor, and he coined

the phrase “welfare queen” in his 1976 presidential bid. Now Clinton hoped to “end welfare as we know it,” in large part through the creation of work requirements. His plan, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, seemed a success in the strong economy of the late 1990s and even during the moderate recession of 2001. But in the recession of 2008, the floor fell out. Work requirements were okay if there were jobs, but now there were none. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, sixty-eight families received TANF for every one hundred families in poverty in 1996. By 2011, the proportion had fallen to twenty-seven families for every hundred. The inability of parents to meet the work requirements mandated under Clinton meant far more children than before were living in poverty.

One fact encapsulates Reagan’s impact on Clinton. As a candidate for president in 1992, Clinton had been enthusiastic about investing more in transportation infrastructure; so when the economic boom of the 1990s created a budget surplus, public works seemed an obvious recipient of increased funding. But under Rubin’s influence, Clinton promised instead to pay down the debt Reagan had built up. By Clinton’s last year in office, the federal government was spending less on infrastructure as a percentage of GDP than it had under Reagan.

Of course, Clinton’s debt trimming was utterly undone by George W. Bush, who proved more dedicated to Reagan’s vision than to his father’s kinder, gentler America. “I think he’s the most Reagan-like politician we have seen, certainly in the White House,” said Michael Deaver, a former Reagan aide. “I mean, his father was supposed to be the third term of the Reagan presidency—but then he wasn’t. This guy is.” The younger Bush cut taxes sharply, as we know, and then started two wars without funding them. In large part as a result of Bush’s policies, the economic recovery that followed the collapse of the dot-com bubble was the slowest in the post-World War II period. By Bush’s final year in office, the deficit had risen to about \$1 trillion—demonstrating yet again that Reagan’s party isn’t opposed to irresponsible government

spending, so long as the money doesn’t go to Americans in need. This deficit left America unprepared for the collapse in tax revenues that came with the financial crisis.

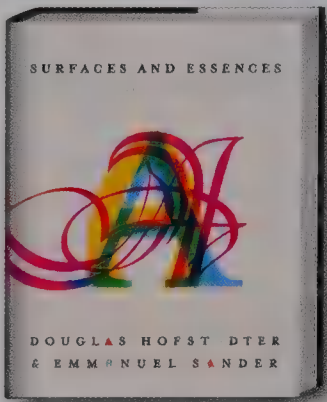
Having inherited this crisis, the Obama Administration ought to have made creating jobs its priority from day one. Instead, it joined the battle against the federal deficit even before Inauguration Day. In 2010, Obama appointed two deficit hawks, Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson, to come up with a budget-balancing plan, which they did—an extremely stultifying one, holding government spending to its average level since 1970 despite an aging population and rising health-care costs. Fortunately, the president did not accept the Bowles–Simpson commission’s recommendations, but deficit cutting rather than job creation remained Obama’s priority until 2011, and it seems now to have returned to the top of his list.

Obama has always been afraid of calling too much attention to government. The stimulus program established early in his first term may have kept the nation from an outright depression, but Obama didn’t boast about its benefits during his reelection campaign. And he certainly didn’t come back to Congress for more.

In his second inaugural speech, Obama listed a parade of goals that would make Americans proud of their citizenship again. At such times, he seems ready to fight for the social programs and public investments the nation needs for a strong recovery. But since then he’s continued to show himself to be a member of the austerity-economics brigade. His future budgets will be riddled with compromises. He’s likely to reduce Social Security benefits, and maybe even raise the Medicare eligibility age to sixty-seven. In a time of severe long-term unemployment and entrenched poverty, vital programs for the poor like Medicaid may be cut back. All of these cuts would be mistakes.

If Obama must use Reagan as a guide it should be as a guide to what not to do. It is time to bring the Age of Cruelty to an end. ■

THE BUILDING
BLOCKS OF
THOUGHT



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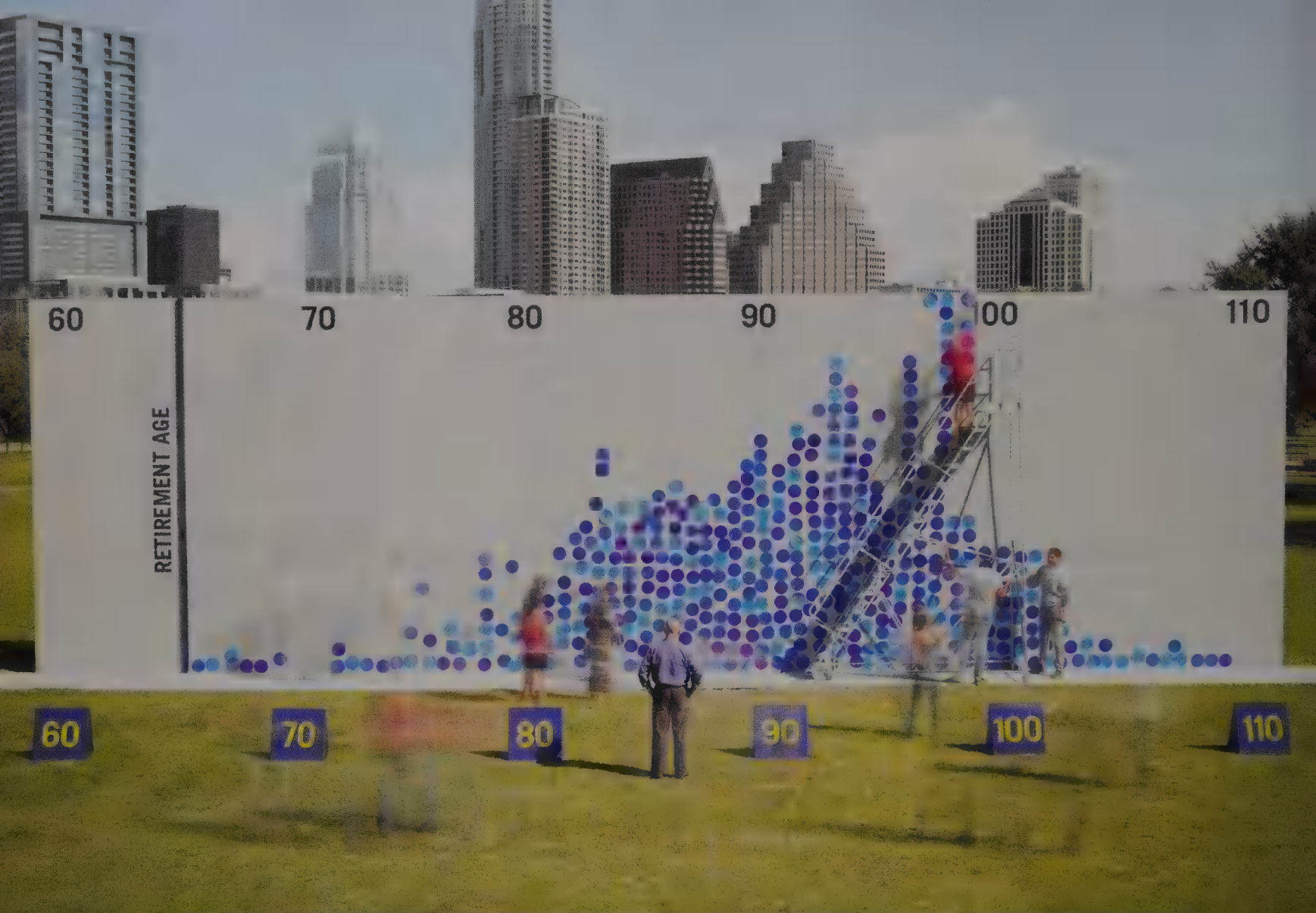
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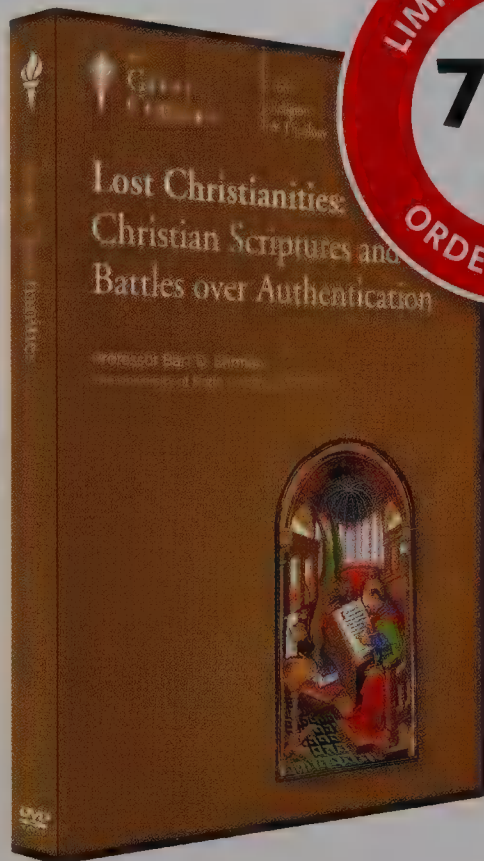


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HARPER'S INDEX

- Chance that a U.S. combat pilot suffers from a mental-health problem ■ 1 in 17
 - That a remote drone pilot does ■ 1 in 12
- Estimated percentage change since 2007 in the number of U.S. veterans committing suicide each day ■ +22
- Portion of all active-duty U.S. servicepeople who committed suicide in 2011 who had never been deployed ■ 1/2
 - Number of people killed in mass shootings in the United States last year ■ 66
 - Number killed by Muslim-American terrorists since September 11, 2001 ■ 33
- Number of former prosecutors President Obama has nominated to the federal judiciary ■ 99
 - Number of former public defenders ■ 33
- Number of presidential question-and-answer sessions held with the media during George W. Bush's first term ■ 355
 - During Obama's first term ■ 107
- Number of on-air minutes during last fall's campaign season that CNN devoted to climate change ■ 23
 - To Joe Biden's smile ■ 43
- Percentage change in the incomes of the top 1 percent of earners during the economic recovery ■ +11.2
 - Of the bottom 99 percent ■ -0.4
- Chance that an American has been laid off at least once since the start of the recession ■ 1 in 4
 - Portion of Americans who believe that they are "living the American dream" ■ 1/4
 - Profits earned by Facebook last year ■ \$1,100,000,000
 - Tax refund the company received from the federal government ■ \$429,000,000
- Percentage of movies that led the U.S. box office for at least one weekend in 2011 that featured Apple products ■ 42
 - Portion of all North American Internet traffic accounted for by videos streamed from Netflix ■ 1/4
 - Rank of the United States among porn actor-producing nations ■ 1
 - Rank of Hungary ■ 2
- Number of amendments made to a February parliamentary bill legalizing same-sex marriage in France ■ 5,395
 - Chance an American provides financial support to both adult children and elderly parents ■ 1 in 9
 - Percentage change since 2001 in the number of U.S. young adults who have credit card debt ■ -22
 - In the number who have student-loan debt ■ +54
- Minimum number of exams a student must take between third and twelfth grade under No Child Left Behind ■ 17
- Percentage change since 1976 in the test-score gap between the children of America's richest and poorest deciles ■ +40
 - Amount Florida spent per student on testing in 1996 ■ \$4.44
 - Last year ■ \$30.59
 - Percentage change since 1980 in California's spending on public universities ■ -13
 - On prisons ■ +436
 - Number of U.S. states that have fewer abortion providers today than in 1978 ■ 48
- Portion of U.S. women with a bachelor's degree who use sterilization as their primary form of birth control ■ 1/10
 - Of U.S. women without a high school diploma who do ■ 2/5
 - Factor by which white girls are more likely than black girls to binge drink ■ 2
- Percentage change since 2002 in the portion of U.S. women who use the morning-after pill ■ +175
- Percentage of horses in the 2012 Kentucky Derby that had the thoroughbred Mr. Prospector in their pedigree ■ 95
 - That had him in their pedigree more than once ■ 55

*Figures cited are the latest available as of March 2013. Sources are listed on page 75.
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5. Early Christian Gnosticism—An Overview
6. The Gnostic Gospel of Truth
7. Gnostics Explain Themselves
8. The Coptic Gospel of Thomas
9. Thomas’ Gnostic Teachings
10. Infancy Gospels
11. The Gospel of Peter
12. The Secret Gospel of Mark
13. The Acts of John
14. The Acts of Thomas
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16. Forgeries in the Name of Paul
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READINGS

[Memoir]

FEI FEI

By Liao Yiwu, from *For a Song and a Hundred Songs*, out next month from New Harvest. Liao, who was born in China in 1958, spent four years in prison for writing dissident poetry after the Tiananmen Square massacre. *God Is Red*, a collection of Liao's profiles of Christians in China, was published in 2011. Translated from the Chinese by Wenguang Huang.

In 1988, when the era of automobiles dawned in China, my older sister, Fei Fei, died in a freak car accident. She was thirty-seven years old.

It was the first time I had experienced the death of someone close to me. My grandpa had passed away earlier that year, but he had lived in a remote village and had never been part of my life. Mourning for him seemed merely a family obligation. But Fei Fei was my beloved sister; we were two melons from the same vine, and her death affected me profoundly.

I have written many heartbreaking essays and poems about it, deliberately avoiding the bloody and gruesome details of her final moments. Describing her death as a formless abstraction was more tolerable in my state of ravenous grief and possibly even less repugnant to the gentle, refined spirit of the deceased. But between truth and eternity, I chose to focus on another dimension. In the mystical world traversed by many romantic artists, Fei Fei's spirit merged with nature, where it could soar, transformed. If Fei Fei had been looking down, she would have been embarrassed by the decorous phrases I heaped on her. She was an angelic being, I wrote, "bathed in rays of static light."

When I first began secretly jotting down ideas for this memoir at Sichuan Provincial

Prison No. 3 in 1993, I constantly returned to memories of Fei Fei—she was my imaginary first reader. Over the subsequent years, when the prospect of getting this book published was nil, writing for Fei Fei became my sole motivation to continue.

As the eldest child, Fei Fei toiled all her life. Ever since she was a little girl, her job had been to wash the family clothes by hand, kneading them against the ridges of a washboard. Incredibly, the hard work seemed to lift her spirits—she would burst into old movie tunes, singing lyrics I retained for many years. At night, she liked to regale me and our siblings with horror stories about dead bodies reanimating themselves in the morgue, or a grisly murder inside the city's ancient bell tower. Often my sister's stories would send us under a quilt with only our ears exposed.

In 1966, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, Fei Fei left home to take up a job at a logging firm in the faraway Pingwu county, in northwest Sichuan. Before long, the whole country was engulfed in turmoil. Our family also fell apart under the attacks of the Red Guards. Our father, the son of a former landlord, taught Chinese literature at a high school in Yanting, a small city in northeast Sichuan. For this, he was labeled a counterrevolutionary. To protect us, our parents divorced, and we were placed in the sole custody of our mother, who packed our meager belongings and hurried us south, to the capital city of Chengdu. There, we took shelter with our aunt.

I had turned eight that year, and life was hard without my father. Soon after our arrival in Chengdu, my aunt's neighbors reported on our supposed infractions. Accusing my mother of being the wife of an escaped landlord and living in the city without a permit, the authorities expelled us. Once again we had to pack



"Dawn 37" and "Dawn 16," photographs by Yu Yamauchi, on view last December at Miyako Yoshinaga Gallery, in New York City. The artist produced his DAWN series while living five months a year for four years in a hut near the summit of Mt. Fuji.

and leave, and this time we found a home in a nearby suburb. We had no money to buy food. One day, a relative gave my mother a coupon that was good for one six-foot-long piece of cloth. My mother intended to sell the coupon on the black market in exchange for some food for the family, but she got caught by the Public Security Bureau. In those days, it was a serious offense to sell government-issued coupons. They detained her and then denounced her, along with other criminals, on the stage of the Sichuan Opera House, in front of thousands of people. Somehow, I was sheltered from the

news initially, so I was devastated when many of my classmates informed me that they had seen the authorities parading my mother around the opera stage.

In Pingwu, Fei Fei was spared the family's hardships and political troubles. In fact, she later said those years in Pingwu were the happiest of her life. By fabricating a politically suitable family history, she was even able to join a singing troupe responsible for propagating the thoughts of Chairman Mao; she won rave reviews for her portrayal of an underground Communist Party member masquerading as the



proprietress of a tea shop, in the Beijing opera *Shajiabang*. My inventive sister soon became a minor celebrity. Even now, my mother keeps an old picture of a tall, slender Fei Fei in her tea-shop owner's costume, posing onstage against a backdrop of snowcapped mountains.

Fei Fei's fans in Pingwu could easily have filled an auditorium. Not surprisingly, she had many suitors and her love life was filled with drama. After she rejected the affections of one handsome young fellow, he committed suicide by swallowing several boxes of matches. In later years, Fei Fei fell deeply in love

with a military officer. The army, however, disapproved of their union after finding out that our father was a "counterrevolutionary." The relationship ended.

Three years after that, Fei Fei married a former colleague and relocated, giving birth to two girls. Though her own family demanded her full attention, she still found time to take care of her siblings and to help our parents. My elder brother had been sent to work in the countryside after high school, and during breaks he would travel hundreds of miles to stay with her. My younger sister and I also visited her often.

She shared her food rations with us and bought us clothes with her savings.

During the Lunar New Year celebrations in 1988, Fei Fei and I sat around the charcoal stove, chatting and catching up until dawn. Life wasn't too easy for her. She was planning a business trip to Pingwu to purchase some lumber on behalf of a company in Chengdu. With her commission from the deal, she intended to take Mom and Dad to Jiangxi province, where they had first met.

"It's been so long since I had a vacation," Fei Fei reflected.

A week later, I saw her off at the Chengdu train station. Passengers swarmed the check-in gate. Fei Fei took her bag from me, slung it over her shoulder. Before she was swept away by the wave of humans, she yelled back, "I'm going now! Bye!"

That was our final farewell. Each time I think about it, my throat feels like it is filled with stones.

As planned, Fei Fei traveled to Pingwu with a friend. She had taken the winding mountain path countless times, but on this occasion the minibus, with seven passengers on board, spun out of control. Careening down a ridge, it tee-

tered perilously on the edge of a cliff with its front wheel jutting into the air. In the violent descent, Fei Fei was flung out of the bus. Her body flew through the air until it was impaled on a sharp tree limb that cut through her waist. When they reached her, she was soaked in blood. The driver was able to get the bus back onto the road, and as he sped to the hospital Fei Fei's friend kept her awake by softly calling her name while urging the driver to go faster. She never reached the hospital. The moment before she died, Fei Fei pressed her lips to her friend's ear, apparently trying to murmur something. Then she was gone.

I've always wondered: Did Fei Fei's soul take the minibus to Jiangxi in search of the village where she was conceived?

Our parents met in Jiangxi in 1948. They never talked about how they fell in love, but over the years we managed to piece together a rough sketch from our maternal grandmother of how their life began.

My mother's younger brother ran an itinerant Beijing opera troupe that performed in the provinces along the Yangtze River. They drifted into a small town in Jiangxi's Panyang Lake region. Known for his quick temper, my uncle offended a local landlord, who, along with some hired thugs, beat him to death. My grandma hurried to the little town with my mother to bury my uncle. As the two women burned money in front of the new grave and bid farewell to the departed, a young teacher happened to pass by. He was touring the scenic area on his spring vacation. Thanks to their common accents, my future mother made my future father's acquaintance. It was fate.

Before her death, my grandma entrusted my mother to the care of the young man. They were married and had four children; Fei Fei was the eldest and I the third. It was not, however, a tranquil domestic life. As far as I can remember, my parents' marriage was marked by turbulence, and they spent much of their time together bickering and squabbling. My mother would say, "We never thought about whether we loved each other or not. We had to survive and raise a family."

There were no photographs from the early years of our family life. Only one group picture survived, of my paternal grandmother, my father, my elder brother, and Fei Fei. We treated it like an excavated artifact. And when Fei Fei came of age, she filled the void by taking many rich and colorful pictures in those drab and monotonous years of the Cultural Revolution. She had a waist-high stack of albums filled with black-and-white snapshots chronicling every family milestone. Four decades after that

[Poem]

GRACE AND THE CHILCOT INQUIRY

By Nick Laird, from Go Giants, to be published in September by W. W. Norton. Laird is the author, most recently, of the novel Glover's Mistake.

My daughter's two weeks old tonight
and my wife wants me to talk to her more
so I started to explain how the answer
I did the thing I thought was right
was enthymematic, and meant to obscure
another rather major conjecture viz.
I do the thing I think it right to do.

Her slow blinks mean that in democracies
the leader's not allowed to operate
according solely to what he or she decrees
is just or necessary; and my brand new
constituent looked appropriately cross
when I began to sing 'Amazing Grace'
to the tune 'The Sash My Father Wore.'

accidental encounter between my mother and my father on a hilltop in Jiangxi, after our family had expanded into different parts of the country, Fei Fei was the first one to return to that cemetery.

I received the news of Fei Fei's death by telegram in Fuling, a city in the mountains of eastern Sichuan province where I was poet in residence at a municipal institute. Tucking the telegram into my breast pocket, I left my tearful wife, A Xia. For the next two nights I traveled, first by boat, then by train, to my sister's home in Mianyang, more than 600 miles away. As the train approached Mianyang, I began to realize how much I dreaded seeing her body in the morgue after days of seeing her in my mind's eye as I remembered her.

When I reached her home, the house had already been cleaned out. Stacks of black mourning sheets lay piled up in a corner. Outside, on the balcony, scraps of half-burned paper wreaths danced up and down in the evening wind. Relatives stood around stoically like pieces of old furniture in the living room. An urn stood on a table at the center of the room.

"What took you so long?" my younger sister, Xiao Fei, snarled.

"We waited three days for you," said my brother-in-law. "With the weather so warm, we had to act fast."

I reached into my pocket to get the telegram and checked the date. Somehow, it had sat for two days before being transmitted. Tears flooded down my cheeks. I had missed the funeral but been spared the sight of my sister's corpse. The realization hit me: Fei Fei's spirit must have intervened. I put on a black armband and retreated to the balcony. At dusk, claps of thunder echoed around us. The earth vibrated like a stage on the verge of collapsing. I left my sister's home and pushed my way through the thick curtain of rain. Streetlights blinked like the eyes of ghosts. Cars swam in the water like sea animals. The vendors' makeshift shelters bent in the wind. I waded in the water and kept going, too afraid to stop, afraid that I would be drowned in sadness.

I sought out a poet friend. We sat at a nearby restaurant, drenched from the rain, and drank. In an attempt to distract me from the family tragedy, my friend brought up the perennial topic of literature. Very soon, we were bantering loudly about the future of avant-garde poetry in China. The argument helped my appetite, but the mouth that did the talking and eating seemed to belong to someone else. A stern voice inside me said it was time to grieve, but it was eclipsed by the beautiful, serene night after a heavy rain. I rejected grief, preferring instead the image of Fei Fei beaming at me with her perfect white teeth and dimpled cheeks. How could my

sister, this gentle breeze, have been mangled by the violence of a car accident?

The stare of a young woman seated nearby seared my cheeks. I craved a healthy body glowing with animalistic desire; the burning passion could certainly dry my wet skin. I needed to bury my head in her breasts and hide myself inside that familiar childhood shelter to return to the illusions Fei Fei's death had shattered.

Half an hour later, I followed her to her door. The stranger turned out to be a newlywed, and her husband was away on a business trip. Silently, we kissed each other in the darkness before

[Security]

THE ELEMENTS OF GUILE

From more than 3,000 terms used in emails between employees engaged in corporate wrongdoing, collected from fraud investigations since 2009 and used by the accounting firm Ernst & Young in the development of its Fraud Triangle Analytics software, which flags personal correspondence in which expressions of "incentive/pressure" and "opportunity" coincide with "rationalization."

cover up
gray area
special payment
off the books
facilitation fee
bullshit
cash incentive
special service
under the radar
cookie jar
offshore
quid pro quo
adjust invoices
shady deal
hush money
friend fee
massage earnings
I'm the boss
for crying out loud
corrupt bastard
deep shit
want no part of this
hit the fan
It's gonna be my ass
Everyone does it

too stupid to figure it out
fresh start
I don't get paid enough
told me to
gambling problem
not a good idea
ticking time bomb
tired of this
It's immaterial
treat me this way
part of my job
phony
divorce
girlfriend
medical bills
vacation home
wife is demanding
broke
charade
ploy
play ball
red tape
sweetener
Don't worry about it
No one will notice



COURTESY THE ARTIST AND SIKKEMA JENKINS & CO., NEW YORK CITY

Waiting on the Sand, a painting by Jorge Queiroz, whose work was exhibited in February at Sikkema Jenkins & Co., in New York City.

fumbling our way to the bed. In her house, we quickly turned into two hungry wolves, as if trying to tear out each other's intestines and lungs. She moaned with pleasure and, at the height of her passion, bit me as if I were a piece of bamboo shoot, leaving bruises on my neck and back. My mourning outfit lay strewn on the floor. The trees rustled outside, their shadows flickered on the window. It sounded to me as though Fei Fei were sighing in disappointment and anger. I had stained the memories of my sister.

In the decade following Fei Fei's death, guilt over that sexual escapade in the immediate aftermath of her funeral haunted me, but when I was with my poet friends, I fell back into my old ways. It was a time when the old had given way and a new era was still waiting to be defined. Under Mao, ordinary citizens had been

subjected to detention and jail sentences for premarital sex and adultery. With the death of Mao, old, puritanical values were gradually evaporating, especially in the world of literature. Young poets contended not only for recognition of their genre-defying works but also over the number of women they had slept with. A well-known society for avant-garde poets was practically a smoke-filled sex club, where orgies and swinging were common.

I never fully joined this epicurean poetry society, but I led the life of a well-dressed hypocrite, a poet who portrayed himself as a positive role model but all the while breathed in women as if I were breathing air, seeking shelter and warmth in random sex. I had turned into a ghost. As we are well aware, in Chinese culture ghosts possess no heart and never need to repent.

TOO BIG TO JAIL

From the transcript of a March 7 Senate Banking Committee hearing on enforcement of the Bank Secrecy Act of 1970, which requires U.S. financial institutions to help the federal government prevent money laundering. Elizabeth Warren is a Democratic senator from Massachusetts; David Cohen is the Treasury's undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence; Jerome Powell is a governor of the Federal Reserve.

ELIZABETH WARREN: In December, HSBC admitted to laundering \$881 million for Mexican and Colombian drug cartels, and also admitted to violating our sanctions against Iran, Libya, Cuba, Burma, the Sudan. They didn't do it just one time. It wasn't like a mistake. They did it over and over and over again over a period of years. And they were caught doing it. Warned not to do it. And kept right on doing it. And evidently making profits doing it. Now, HSBC paid a fine, but no one individual went to trial. No one individual was banned from banking. And there was no hearing to consider shutting down HSBC's activities here in the United States. So what I'd like is—you're the experts on money laundering. I'd like your opinion. What does it take? How many billions of dollars do you have to launder for drug lords and how many economic sanctions do you have to violate before someone will consider shutting down a financial institution like this? Mr. Cohen, can we start with you?

DAVID COHEN: Certainly, Senator. No question, the activity that was the subject of the enforcement action against HSBC was egregious. For our part, we imposed on HSBC the largest penalties that we had ever imposed on any financial institution. We looked at the facts and determined that the appropriate response there was a very, very significant penalty.

WARREN: But let me just move you along here, Mr. Cohen. What does it take to get you to move toward even a hearing? Even considering shutting down banking operations for money laundering?

COHEN: Senator, we at the Treasury Department don't have the authority to shut down a financial institution.

WARREN: I understand that. I'm asking, in your opinion, you are the ones who are supposed to be the experts on money laundering. You work with everyone else, including the Department of Justice. In your opinion, how many billions of dollars do you have to launder for drug lords before somebody says, "We're shutting you down"?

COHEN: We take these issues extraordinarily seriously. We aggressively prosecute and impose penalties against the institutions to the full extent of our authority. And one of the issues that we're looking at—

WARREN: I'm sorry, I don't mean to interrupt. I just need to move this along. I'm not hearing your opinion on this. Treasury is supposed to be one of the leaders in how we understand and work together to stop money laundering. I'm asking, what does it take, even to say, "We're going to draw a line here, and if you cross that line, you're at risk for having your bank closed"?

COHEN: We will, and have, and will continue to exercise our authority to the full extent of the law. The question of pulling a bank's license is a question for the regulators.

WARREN: So you have no opinion on that? You tell me how vigorously you want to enforce these laws, but you have no opinion on when it is that a bank should be shut down for money laundering? Not even an opinion?

COHEN: Of course we have views on—

WARREN: That's what I asked you for. Your views.

COHEN: I'm not going to get into some hypothetical line-drawing exercise.

WARREN: Well, it's somewhere beyond \$881 million of drug money.

COHEN: Well, Senator, the actions that we took in the HSBC case we thought were appropriate in that instance.

WARREN: Governor Powell, perhaps you can help me out here?

JEROME POWELL: Sure. So the authority to shut down an institution or hold a hearing about it, I believe, is triggered by a criminal conviction. And we don't do criminal investigation. In the case of HSBC, we gave essentially the statutory maximum civil money penalties. We gave very stringent cease-and-desist orders. And we did what we have the legal authority to do.

WARREN: I appreciate that, Mr. Powell. So you're saying you have no advice to the Justice Department on whether or not this was an appropriate case for a criminal action?

POWELL: It's not our jurisdiction. They don't do monetary policy. We collaborate with them, and we did on HSBC. They ask us specific questions. We answer those questions. That's what we do.

WARREN: So you are responsible for these banks, but you have no view on when it's appropriate to consider even a hearing to raise the question of whether or not these banks should have to close their operations when they engage in money laundering for drug cartels?

POWELL: I'll tell you exactly when it's appropriate. It's appropriate where there's a criminal conviction.

WARREN: I'll just say here, if you're caught with an ounce of cocaine, the chances are good you're

going to go to jail. If it happens repeatedly, you may go to jail for the rest of your life. But evidently if you launder nearly a billion dollars for drug cartels and violate our international sanctions, your company pays a fine and you go home and sleep in your own bed at night. I think that's fundamentally wrong.

[Investigation]

FINAL JEOPARDY

From more than 200 questions posed by jurors over two days in March during the trial of Jodi Arias. Arias, who stands accused of the 2008 murder of her former lover Travis Alexander, first told police that she was driving to see a love interest, Ryan Burns, in Utah on the night of the murder, then later claimed she killed Alexander in self-defense during an argument over a dropped camera that ensued while she was photographing him in the shower. Arias faces the death penalty. Arizona is one of three states that require judges to allow jurors to question witnesses in criminal trials.

You testified Travis gave you the Book of Mormon at Starbucks. Did you read it thoroughly, and, if so, when?

Why were the laws of attraction so important to follow but the law of chastity was not?

Why would you continue to stay with someone who had sex with you while you were sleeping?

You mentioned an earlier failed attempt at using rope during a sexual encounter. Can you tell us what happened the day this occurred and how Travis handled the failure?

If you didn't want to be tied up to a tree, why would you go and look for a place where he could do that?

What is your understanding of the word "skank"?

You initially testified that sex was a way for Travis to relieve stress, then said it was a way to relieve anger. Which is it?

How do you know that?

Do you feel the guys in your life cheated on you because you were controlling?

Travis stated during the phone-sex conversation he did not like Spider-Man. Why did he buy you Spider-Man underwear if he did not like that character?

Did you call any men you did not have a romantic interest in "hotty biscotti" in text messages, emails, or instant messages?

Would you classify your relationship with Travis as a "love/hate" relationship?

If Travis lunged at you, why didn't you just move to the side out of his way?

You remember dropping the knife and screaming but don't remember taking the gun or rope with you. Is that correct?

You claimed that everything happened so fast and you didn't have time to think, so how could you think of grabbing the gun from the closet?

How can you say you don't have memory issues if you can't remember how you stabbed him so many times and slashed his throat?

Were you "in the fog" when you were kissing Ryan?

When did you realize that you had memory loss? The approximate date.

If you were driving to a place you'd never been before, meaning Utah, why wouldn't you map out different towns that had gas stations and rest stops?

How do you determine when you will tell the truth and when you will not tell the truth? What are the determining factors?

Were you mad at Travis while you were stabbing him?

Why did you send his grandmother flowers?

What is your relationship with your mother like?

Were you paid for the interview with *Inside Edition*?

You say you waited two years to tell the truth because you were ashamed. Does that mean you are no longer ashamed?

Would you agree that you came away from the June 4 incident rather unscathed, while Travis suffered a gunshot and multiple stab wounds?

[Scenario]

CASE STUDY (C. 1904)

By Joshua Cohen, from Attention! A (Short) History, published this month in the United Kingdom by Notting Hill Editions. Cohen, a contributing editor of Harper's Magazine, is the author, most recently, of a short-story collection, Four New Messages.

a) You are a woman working as the sole typist at a factory. You work on the office floor above the production floor. Last week you'd typed an interoffice memo from the owner to the manager telling him to "prepare a report on the suitability of employing women in our workplace," but then this week you typed an interoffice memo from the manager to the production chiefs telling them to "prepare reports on the effect on our workplace of employing women," which implied, to you at least, that a decision had been made, that female workers would be hired. You are conflicted. You are confused.

b) The reports are submitted, handwritten, and you type them up. No consensus is achieved. One notes that approx. 20% of the U.S. workforce is women; another notes that approx. 20% of U.S. women work. Labor statistics, phys/psych studies, are cited: "melancholy," "morbidity," "hysteria," "neuroses." Other data are anecdotal, or polemic—political pamphlets for and against. One report insists that an increase in women working led to an increase in profits; another insists to a *decrease*; another insists to an increase, but in agriculture (which strikes you as a false standard for manufacturing, because factory workers don't live at their factories, but farmers live and work on their farms); another insists to a decrease, but in agriculture (which strikes you as a false standard for manufacturing, because factory workers don't eat and drink their own products for sustenance); while yet another insists that, percentagewise, the number of working women didn't increase, but merely stayed in line with previous figures (80% of all typists share your gender). The only datum you can establish definitely is that between the Censuses of 1890 and 1900 the state of Iowa lost two people, one to a head wound from a horse newly shod (your father), the other to tuberculosis (your mother). Council Bluffs, from where you escaped. Even the Sioux had gotten out of there.

c) You live on Greenwich Lane with another typist (at another firm). Loves suffrage, hates temperance. Irish Catholic but an orphan, too, and so a sister nonetheless. Her father collapsed in the Park Avenue Tunnel, her mother from the Russian gripe. She'll try to get you out dancing tonight, to celebrate her new schedule: from working six days per week to working five. Still eight hours per day, now forty per week. Her Friday nights are now free. Saturdays, too. You suspect this has to do with the unions, or socialists, or communists, or Jews. But you can't go out dancing tonight, because you're still working six days. You're not disappointed, however. You suspect that with her newly weekly bookkeeping sessions on Mondays, and her newly weekly training sessions on Wednesdays, designed to familiarize her with the new comptometer calculating machines under the tutelage of their new sales representative, your roommate's total work time, despite the Saturday reprieves, will actually *increase*.

"The weekend." You go to work on Saturday just as your roommate's coming back, babbling about the sales rep—"built like the Fuller Building"—who goes to a gymnasium where he walks on a rubber path that goes nowhere and bicycles in place. You take the subway, though as your office is on 46th Street you're never sure which stop, 42nd or 50th. Your home stop is as far away as 14th Street, but you don't mind the walk. Strange times when you can trust the Wright Bros. over a cruise on the *General Slocum*. You come back from work on Saturday and your

roommate is gone, and you stay up waiting for her, reading the comptometer manual.

d) On Sunday you shut all the doors and windows, from embarrassment. You go to your wardrobe, set aside the folded waists, reach below the automobile bonnet, but above the fleecy nullifiers. The typewriter you pinched and skimped for. A device of your own, to use at home, alone, this is what embarrasses you. As Sunday turns, you

[Security]

COOP DE GRÂCE

From an exchange last summer between Jean-Pierre Decool, a member of the French National Assembly, and Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. Translated from the French by Jess Cotton.

QUESTION

Jean-Pierre Decool directs the attention of the Defense Minister to the use of the carrier pigeon in armed conflict. In the event of armed conflict, a general breakdown in communication networks might occur. In such circumstances, the carrier pigeon would become the sole remaining tool to transmit messages. Currently, the French army employs just one military pigeon, at the Mont Valérien base. Decool urges the Minister to indicate, given the current state of our infrastructure, whether the French army's communicative capacity will be safeguarded.

RESPONSE

The Defense Minister's strategy, in terms of controlling information, is to guarantee, in all circumstances, the relay of vital data to decision makers, using technologies that possess their own electrical supply and are resistant to cybernetic and electromagnetic threats. The communicative capacity of the army will thus be preserved in the event of major conflict, whatever the state of civil infrastructure. As the honorable Member of Parliament points out, the carrier pigeon has throughout history proved of certain interest in military operations. Reliable and hardy, it has enabled the military to free itself from the grips of insecure means of land communication. The army therefore makes use of Europe's last military pigeon. France has an additional 20,000 amateur pigeon keepers capable of providing invaluable support in the event of the impairment of civil telecommunication networks.

complete the reports, with stricter concentration than at the office. No ticktacky stock jottings. No bell-ringing cold candlesticks. But you've never worked this late before. You've never even stayed up this late before. Your roommate still hasn't come back. You doubt that she's at mass.

You consider the conclusions: female employment should be confined to the office; should be confined to the unmarried population ("widows and spinsters included"). "A dainty danger." "Spare perilous distraction." "Manual labor dulls the feminine." "Women make excellent typists, but the manual dexterity and concentrative capacities peculiar to the typewriter do not transfer to the production floor." The manager who'd asked you out to Coney Island a season ago and is still waiting for an answer: "Women are naturally less productive than are men. Though it is our policy to pay weekly wages, if women are to be hired it is recommended to pay them instead on the basis of piecework. To pay them a wage equal to a man's, for work in no way equal to a man's, is unjust. To pay them per piece is to recognize women's unique maladies, enabling them to moderate their health, and us to moderate our payroll. It might also serve to foster a sense of competition that would accrue to mutual benefit." 2¢/page.

[Semantics]

POETIC LICENSE

From correspondence recently received and sent by members of Washington State's Personalized License Plate Review Committee.

SHGNWGN—We feel that this plate could be offensive to good taste and is misleading. The registered owner states that the meaning is "name of Scooby-Doo's van." In researching, it was found that the name of Scooby-Doo's van is the Mystery Machine.

I was shocked and offended that someone would make a complaint about my plate. JUGALET is simply the name given to fans of an underground Christian record label (Psychopathic Records).

Recently while driving, I was behind a sedan with plates bearing PUINSAL. While this term is not known in Washington, it is well known in the Hawaiian Islands. It is loose English/slang for "put inside," which references sex with a woman.

I have submitted to get a personal license plate PORK. I have had that plate before, in the late

'70s, when I first got my driver's license. Now that I'm fifty-two years old, I would like to get it back if possible. I have had that nickname over forty years and to this day I still have friends call me Pork.

I realize that the licensing office makes every effort to prevent offensive and vulgar personalized plates from reaching the road, but I admit I was surprised to see a Chevy Volt today with the plate EF OPEC, in which "EF" clearly means the f-word, since it's attached to an electric vehicle and is meant to insult the OPEC cartel.

I just received this notice advising me about the license number DBACHRE. *Debauchery* has been somehow connected with "unseemly sexual activity." I have never thought about it that way. *Debauchery* always meant to me, "Leading one astray, or going out and drinking and carousing," without the end result or intention to have a sexual liaison.

This plate is issued to Cut Rate Auto Parts, very commonly known as CRAP. We have never received a complaint. It was thoroughly researched prior to being issued, to verify that it is on a vehicle that clearly advertises the meaning of the plate.

I received your letter today in the mail and was very surprised that somebody would take my license plate CACA so far out of context. My niece, when she was a baby, could not say my name, Courtney, and every time she tried it came out "Auntie CaCa."

Re: complaint regarding personalized license plate CEME4DK. As you may notice by my letterhead, I am a dentist here in Washington. My license plate is read as "See me for decay."

[Fiction]

THE GIFT

By Mary Ruefle, from Issue 2 of Unstuck. Ruefle is the author of several books, including, most recently, Madness, Rack, and Honey: Collected Lectures.

The day the living room flooded I had not left the apartment in five days, everything was spotlessly clean, I had no work to do except writing my thoughts in a journal, the thought of



"Untitled 1970-1973," a photograph by William Eggleston, whose work is on view through July at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York City.

which filled me with terror and boredom. That fateful and final morning I was in bed reading, unable to concentrate because of what I had done the day before. The day before I had ordered by telephone a large box of glacé apricots from Australia. The catalogue, South Sea Gifts, showed the fruit in a handsome wooden crate lined with gold foil. They cost \$86.20 and I had them sent to myself with a gift card that said *from Mary to Mary*. I was uneasy because I now had no money to buy groceries with and it would be some time before the apricots arrived, even though I had them sent express, which cost more. I looked forward to them arriving, but at the same time they would, when they arrived, only remind me of my stupidity and terrible guilt. My guilt was tremendous. To have used the last of my money sending myself a gift of glacé apricots! And the gold foil—that had cost more too. The cheaper “home boxes” had more apricots in them but were without gold foil. The gold foil looked so nice, shining beside the golden apricots. Of course I had been looking at a photograph, and I worried that the picture was somehow “touched up,” because I once met a food stylist whose job it was to make photographs of

food look better than the food itself; she used glycerin and starch and hair spray to make things luscious and shining, crisp, fresh, mouth-watering in a tantalizing way. I didn’t want to open the box and be disappointed. I also thought of ordering a circle of white cotton mosquito netting, but came to my senses. At least I could eat the apricots. What would I do with mosquito netting? I just like the way it looks—you can drape it over anything and the draped thing becomes soft and mysterious. I read an article once about a woman who was an intensely intellectual Buddhist and she wanted to make her house as empty and white as possible, but she owned thousands of books, which dragged the energy of the space down, so she simply made vertical pillars of her books and draped them with mosquito netting and got the effect she was after—the effect of owning nothing, wanting nothing, living in a windswept environment of peace. All my extravagant mail ordering—it had me feeling uneasy. I felt vapid and shallow and guilty, I loved my books, and just the sight of them strewn around on low-lying tables and lined up on windowsills and stacked on the floor—along with catalogues and unopened

bills—had always made me feel happy in a teeming, chaotic way and given me the feeling my life was full and interesting, that I was a serious and charming person. I also worried about the people who answered the phone for the catalogue companies—did they have enough to eat? Did they ever steal a glacé apricot or two? I knew they had work, they had to answer phone calls,

[Parody]

THIS IS NOT MY BEAUTIFUL HOUSE

From a February 4 complaint by the U.S. Department of Justice against the credit-rating agency Standard & Poor's, charging that S&P fraudulently inflated ratings on residential-mortgage-backed securities (RMBS) and collateralized debt obligations (CDOs). The Justice Department is seeking \$5 billion in penalties.

On or about March 19, 2007, Analyst D, who had conducted a "risk ranking" analysis of 2006-vintage RMBS, sent an email to several analysts with the subject line: "Burning Down the House—Talking Heads." The email stated:

With apologies to David Byrne, here's my version of "Burning Down the House."


Watch out
Housing market went softer
Cooling down
Strong market is now much weaker
Subprime is boiling over
Bringing down the house

Hold tight
CDO biz—has a bother
Hold tight
Leveraged CDOs they were after
Going—all the way down, with
Subprime mortgages

Minutes later, Analyst D sent a follow-up email stating, "For obvious professional reasons, please do not forward this song. If you are interested, I can sing it in your cube ;-)."

On or about March 21, Analyst D circulated another email, attaching a video of him "singing and dancing" the first verse of the song in S&P offices before an audience of laughing S&P co-workers.

they had to calm the caller down and answer all her questions, they had to explain the difference between a "gift box" and a "home box." I could see them in a cavernous room, sitting in makeshift booths with earphones on. For some reason I draped them all with mosquito netting—I mean each one individually wore a cocoon of soft white gauze. It muffled their voices while they spoke to the customers, the customers had to ask them to repeat what they had just said, so endless loops of repetition began to bubble up from the cocoons. That's how I pictured it. It was then that I heard the water in the living room, bubbling up from some mysterious source. I got out of bed to investigate, and as soon as I entered the hall I saw a pool of brown water advancing toward my feet. I had forgotten to put my slippers on, I was standing in my bare feet, and the brown water came up over my ankles. I waded forward toward the living room. The sofa was covered with mud and pieces of debris—sticks and clumps of leaves, the black gunk that closes off a rain gutter. There was a high-water mark on the television screen, a wavy white salt horizon that crossed the black glass. My books, too, were covered with the wavy lines of loose, disintegrating matter—detritus, I believe it is called. Some piglets were scavenging the place, eating the stuffing out of a chair in the corner, a chair I always read in. Why had I decided to read in bed that morning? I don't know. It was highly unusual. Everything was waterlogged, the legs of the table looked soft, like they were made of oatmeal, and a mass riot of spiders swarmed on top of my table, the way I've seen ants swarm under my welcome mat outside. The flood had obviously subsided. It must have happened during the night when I was sleeping. I thought for a moment that there was a bloated corpse on the floor, but it was just a sack of rotten potatoes that had floated out from under the sink and was stranded in the stagnant water, a gelatinous mass, puffed up and green. I'm ashamed to say my first thought was that I could not possibly clean up this mess by myself; I needed help. And what about those piglets in the corner, devouring my chair? Where had they come from? The place stank. It smelled worse than a sewer. It smelled like a petri dish of primordial ooze and whoever I called for help would have to cordon off more than my living room, the entire building and the block it sat upon would have to be cordoned off, too. And in this way another day of potential reverie had been broken in two, utterly destroyed by my desire for an apricot, a single indiscretion for which my habitat had become a village of sticks on the banks of a rising river, where trade winds blew and the rains came and the mosquitoes bred, and where mosquitoes breed, one will be needing some netting.



With all the money
she'd saved at Daedalus,
Felicity could afford to
trade her mobile home
for mobile gnomes

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THE WAY OF ALL FLESH

Undercover in an industrial slaughterhouse

By Ted Conover



The cattle arrive in perforated silver trailers called cattle pots that let in wind and weather and vent out their hot breath and flatus. It's hard to see inside a cattle pot. The drivers are in a hurry to unload and leave, and are always speeding by. (When I ask Lefty how meat gets bruised, he says, "You ever see how those guys drive?") The trucks have come from feedlots, some nearby, some in western Nebraska, a few in Iowa. The plant slaughters about 5,100 cattle each day, and a standard double-decker cattle pot holds only about forty, so there's a constant stream of trucks pulling in to disgorge, even before the line starts up a little after six A.M.

First the cattle are weighed. Then they are guided into narrow outdoor pens angled diagonally toward the entrance to the kill floor. A veterinarian arrives before our shift and begins to inspect them; she looks for open wounds, problems walking, signs of disease. When their time comes, the cattle

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will be urged by workers toward the curving ramp that leads up into the building. The ramp has a roof and no sharp turns. It was designed by the livestock expert Temple Grandin, and the curves and penumbral light are believed to soothe the animals in their final moments. But the soothing goes only so far.

"Huele mal, no?" says one of the Mexican wranglers: "It stinks, doesn't it?" He holds his nose against the ammoniac smell of urine as I visit the pens with Carolina.¹ We are new U.S. Department of Agriculture meat inspectors, getting

¹ To protect the privacy of people I encountered in and around the slaughterhouse, many names have been changed.

the kitchen tour. The wrangler and his crew are moving cattle up the ramp. To do this, they wave sticks with white plastic bags tied to the ends over the animals' heads; the bags frighten the cattle and move them along. For cows that don't spook, the workers also have electric prods—in defiance, I was told, of company regulations—that crackle when applied to the nether parts. The ramp really does stink. "Yeah," I say in Spanish. "Why does it smell so bad?"

"They're scared. They don't want to die," the worker replies. But that's what they're here to do, and once on the ramp, they're just a few moments away from it.

On the opposite side of the plant is the end of the story. There, scores of refrigerated trailers wait their turn at the loading docks. They'll be filled with boxes of meat and cattle by-products, which will make their way in one form or another to a store or restaurant near you.

In the middle, facing U.S. Highway 30 to the north, is the door through which humans enter the



plant. We enter willingly, from all appearances, and under careful scrutiny: cameras monitor the main entrance (as they do almost the entire plant), and workers must pass through a security shack en route and show their company I.D.'s.

Though I tend to dislike scrutiny, I actually don't mind the shack, because it makes me feel important: instead of a Cargill I.D., I get to flash my police-style USDA badge. And when I leave, at shift's end, the guards can't ask to see what's in my bag, as they can the regular workers. Even my walk to and from the car is shorter, because a couple dozen parking places near the entrance are reserved for the USDA.

While the inspectors work at Cargill Meat Solutions, we are not employed by them. Rather, you could say, we are embedded. The company accommodates us along the chain, at four special places on the kill floor. (In another part of the plant, farther downstream, a different, smaller group of USDA employees grades the meat.) Cargill also provides us with our own locker rooms, a couple of offices for the veterinarians in charge, and a break room where we eat meals and hold meetings.

Carolina and I are not like most of the other inspectors. This becomes obvious as Herb, our immediate supervisor, sits us down to fill out paperwork. The regulars are putting on their white hard hats, grabbing the wide aluminum scabbards that hold their knives, and heading out onto the floor to begin the day. They are mostly white and mostly from the area around Schuyler, Nebraska, the town we sit at the edge of. I grew up in Colorado but arrived in Nebraska from my home in New York City, which strikes many here as odd. Carolina was born in Mexico, spent her childhood in California, came to Nebraska a few years ago, and became a U.S. citizen in the past year. Still, in certain ways she has more in common with our co-workers than I do, because she has worked in meat plants before—the JBS packinghouse in Grand Island, Nebraska, where she was a quality-assurance technician, and before that a kosher slaughterhouse in Hastings, Nebraska, where she worked on the

line—which means she has experience with a knife. Which I do not. That experience, I will soon learn, counts for a lot.

Herb is the tallest inspector, probably by a couple of inches. He reminds me of Garrison Keillor. He is soft-spoken and respectful and regrets that we had to buy our own waterproof boots—he doesn't think that's fair. But he supplies us with the other things we'll need, starting with a dozen uniforms, which consist of navy-blue cotton pants and white short-sleeve shirts with our first names sewn over the breast pockets. (He had ordered these a couple of weeks earlier, asking my size over the phone and suggesting I order a bit large: "You can always grow into 'em—all the rest of us have!") We get digital stopwatches to hang around our necks, so that we can time our breaks and know when to change posts. The aluminum scabbard is flat and about a foot long; it holds our knives, a meat hook, and a sharpening steel. Some inspectors wear the scabbard around their waists, securing it with a white plastic chain. But most just hang it near them at their post. Hairnets are required for everybody, and men with beards must also wear a beard net. Herb hands us each a hard hat and points out the supply of earplugs (also required) sitting on a nearby desk: "Get yourself a pair of those and I'll show you around."

We leave the break room, walk down a short corridor, up some stairs, and through a pair of swinging metal doors to a singular circle of hell. The kill floor is a hubbub of human and mechanical activity, something horrific designed by ingenious and no doubt well-meaning engineers. Herb shouts a few things, but the kill floor is so loud that I have no idea what he's saying—and little understanding, at first, of what I'm seeing. Though it's called a floor, it's actually a room, about the size of a football field. It's filled with workers on their feet, facing some fraction of a cow as it passes slowly in front of them, suspended from the chain. Three workers are perched on hydraulic platforms fitted with electric saws, which they use to split hanging carcasses in half, right down the middle of the spinal column.





The key to comprehension is the chain, which moves the carcasses around the enormous room. It begins on the eastern wall, just beyond the area where the cows come in from the outside. This is the only section of the room hidden from view, behind a partition. But Herb takes us up onto a metal catwalk and through a heavy door. From there, grasping a railing, we can look down on the killing.

Passing one by one through a small opening in the wall, each animal enters a narrow, slightly elevated chute. On a platform just above the chute is a guy called the knocker. Suspended on cables in front of him is something that looks like a fat toaster oven with handles on either side: a captive-bolt gun. The knocker's job is to place the gun against the animal's forehead and pull the trigger. Most of the time, the cow immediately slumps forward, blood oozing from the circle where the thick steel bolt went in and came out. If one shot doesn't do the trick, the knocker does it again.

Meanwhile, down on floor level, a second worker wearing a helmet with a face mask and protective padding has reached into the chute from below and attached a cuff around the animal's left rear leg. Once the cow has been knocked, the chain hoists that leg and then the rest of the animal up into the air, and the body begins its journey around the room.

Carolina and I watch this for some time without talking. The knocker moves slowly, patiently waiting for his gun to achieve good contact with the animal's forehead. It usually takes more than one try, as the animals duck down or try to peer over the side of the chute, whose width the knocker can actually control with a foot pedal. One cow, unlike the others, lifts her head up high in order to sniff the knocking gun. *What could this thing be?* It's her last thought. The knocker waits until her wet nose goes down, then lowers the gun and *thunk*. She slumps, then gets hoisted aloft with the others. The knocked animals hang next to one another for a while, waiting for the chain to start moving—like gondolas at the base of a ski lift. From time to time an animal kicks violently, sporadically. "They're not really dead yet," says Carolina, which I can hear because she's close to my ear and it's slightly less

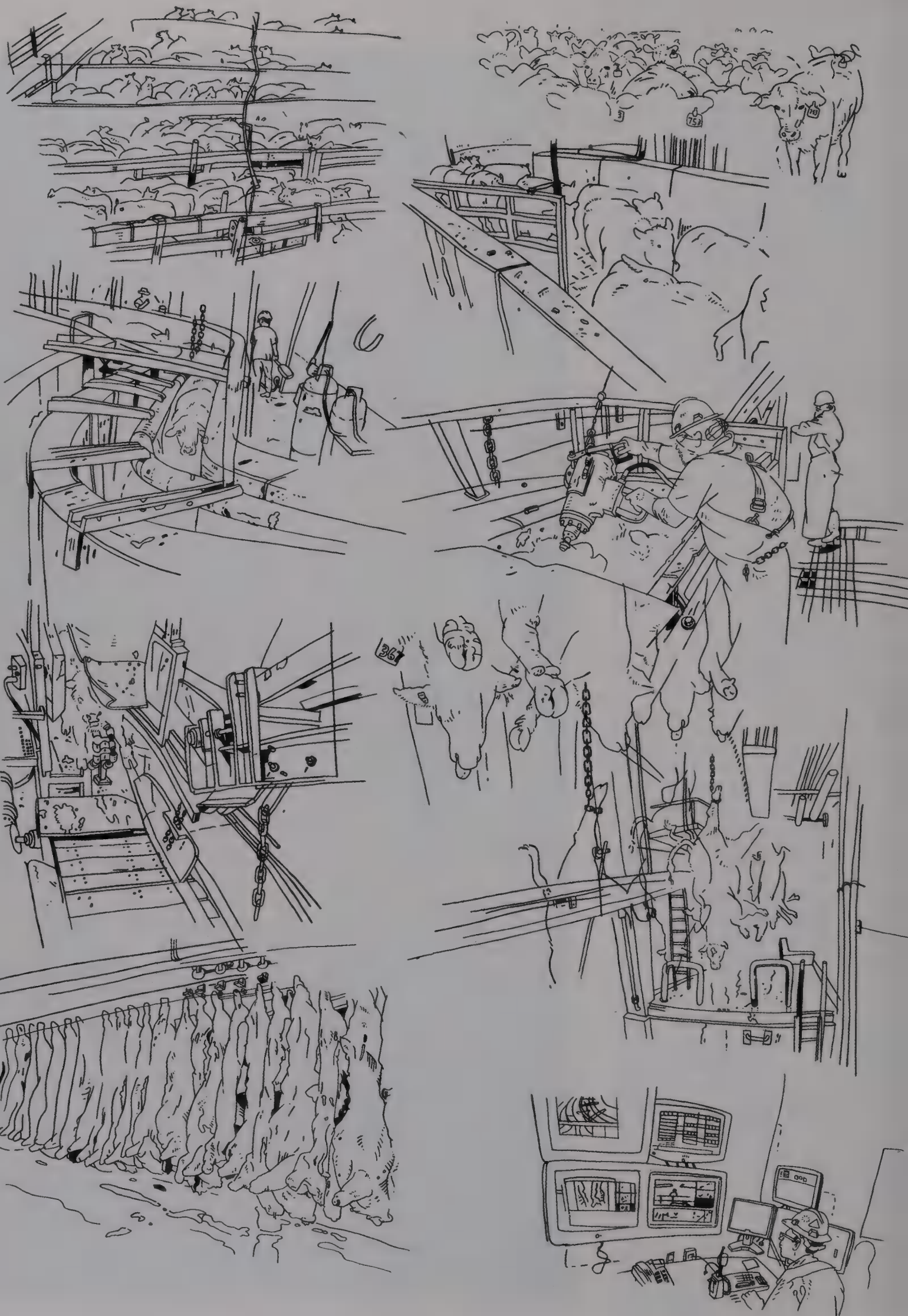
loud in here. In most cases, apparently, what she says is true and intentional: the pumping of their hearts will help drain the blood from their bodies once their necks are sliced open, which will happen in the ensuing minutes. By the time the chain has made a turn or two, the kicking will stop.

Dismemberment proceeds by degrees. At different posts, workers make cuts in the hide, clip off the hooves, and clip off the horns, if any. The hide is gradually peeled from the body, until finally a big flap of loose skin is grasped by the "downpuller" machine, which yanks the whole thing off like a sweater and drops it through a hole in the floor. Here, for the first time, the cow no longer looks like a cow. Now it's a 1,200-pound piece of proto-meat making its circuit of the room.

Soon after, the heads, now dangling only by the windpipe, are detached from the body and go off on their own side chain. The huge tongues are cut out and hung on hooks adjacent to the heads: head, tongue, head, tongue. They turn a corner, pass through a steam cabinet that cleans them, make another quick turn, and meet their first inspectors.

Food inspection in the United States is a patchwork affair. By most accounts, we have Upton Sinclair to thank for the federal effort: *The Jungle* frightened the nation so thoroughly in 1906 that Congress passed legislation mandating inspection the same year. Today, the USDA is responsible for overseeing slaughter operations, employing 7,500 inspectors throughout the country. The Food and Drug Administration is responsible for most other areas: fresh produce (the source of recent outbreaks of such pathogens as *Listeria*, on cantaloupes, and *Salmonella*, on spinach), seafood, dairy, and processed foods like peanut butter. USDA inspection has the bigger budget, reflecting a belief from bygone days that meat carries the greater risk of contamination: without a USDA stamp, meat cannot leave a slaughterhouse. Over the past generation, however, produce and seafood have come to eclipse meat as sources of outbreaks of food-borne illness. Among the reasons are thought to be increasing consumption of fresh food, and food-distribution systems that can quickly





spread contamination across state and international borders.

In 2011, President Obama signed the Food Safety Modernization Act, which strengthens and refocuses the FDA. Meanwhile, a consensus has grown that the USDA's regimen of visual, carcass-by-carcass inspection—enshrined by the 1906 laws—places too much manpower on the kill floor and not enough in labs and meat-grinding plants to test beef for *E. coli*, poultry for *Campylobacter*, and pork for *Toxoplasma*. Already, a cooperative effort between the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and the poultry industry has set the stage for vast reductions in the number of on-site inspectors.

("Splash enough chemicals on and you can call anything safe," a Schuyler inspector told me.) In beef plants, though, the inspectors remain in full force. By law, in fact, the chain cannot move without them.²

Herb leaves us at Heads, the most demanding of the several posts we rotate through during the shift. Five inspectors on the day shift and four at night tend to the fifty feet of chain—and each examines a new head and tongue every minute or so. Carolina and I both have trainers: she's with Lefty and I'm with Stan. We watch what they do and then, over the roar of the machinery, try to digest their explanations and do the same.

Before taking our knives to the hanging heads, we're told to look at them closely. They are a gruesome sight, dripping with blood, eyeballs protruding the way eyeballs do from a skinned skull, small muscles exposed and twitching as though the animal were still alive. The heads face away from us, toward the tiled

wall, for which I'm grateful. First we look into their mouths from behind, through a daffodil-shaped opening that I believe is the epiglottis. We're checking for tonsils, making sure they've been removed. These are considered "specified risk materials" (SRM) and get disposed of along with a portion of the small intestine called the distal ileum.

Next we peek around the side of the head at the teeth in the lower jaw. If three pairs are visible, the animal is thirty months of age or older and at greater risk of carrying bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or mad-cow disease). The brain and the spinal cord of these older cattle are also considered SRM. A worker is supposed to have plugged the knocker's hole in the forehead of such animals with a cork—to prevent the escape of brain matter—and marked the top of the head with blue ink. These heads will be disposed of in a landfill.

The nontactile inspection is over within three seconds. Now comes the hard part. With a knife in one hand and a meat hook in the other, we slice the flesh from the cheeks on either side of the head—the goal is to let the flaps dangle down, not to sever them. As I soon discover, making these cuts neatly takes skill. Done well, they expose a thin layer of meat against the bone, as well as the insides of the lymph nodes next to the ears.

If anything looks amiss, we "mark it out" by stamping the top and sides of the head with blue ink. These heads get thrown down the "condemned chute" to the basement, where they are rendered. If it looks extra bad—say, if a lymph node is full of pus or shows other irregularities—we push a button that sounds a horn and summons a Cargill foreman, who affixes a red tag to the head. That takes about five seconds more.

In the worse cases—heads that show signs of a serious infection, such as tuberculosis—we attach a blue tag, so that Doc Barbera, the veterinarian who heads our FSIS detail, will know

to take a look. (Marking out meat later confirmed to have tuberculosis bacilli earned one Schuyler inspector a \$3,000 bonus.)

Last, we use the hook and knife to hold and slice open six more lymph nodes hanging from the back of the tongue. Somebody skilled, like Stan, can do this in two or three seconds. For Carolina, it's closer to five. For me, at the start, it's more like ten—they're slippery. After cutting open the nodes, we turn to the pedal-operated sink behind us to rinse our knife and hook and rubber-gloved hands of the blood and flesh that now cover them. If we cut into anything vile, knife and hook must also be dipped into the sanitizer, a cylinder of near-boiling water next to the sink.

Then we wait for the next head to move into range.

During our breaks, we can visit the Cargill canteen upstairs, where food is served hot and pretty cheap, and some do. But it's more popular to bring your own food and hang out in the break room, which has the slightly threadbare air of privilege you find in the business lounge of a small airport.

I find the break room fascinating; its bulletin boards, cabinet fronts, and miscellaneous surfaces are all plastered with things to read. There are ponderous directives from the USDA, boring notices about union elections, fuzzy printouts of cattle teeth to aid in the identification of overage animals. A dry-erase board announces shift swaps for the coming week; a photocopied seniority ranking shows Lefty on top. There are a couple of schematics of the plant indicating where to seek cover in case of a tornado.

The refrigerator is adorned with funny pictures and cartoons. *You're not fat*, says one sled dog to another, *you're just a little husky*. On its side are cardboard wheels, one pair for each shift, that indicate where everybody starts on a given day: Heads, Livers, Pluck (the heart and lungs), and Rail (where each carcass gets a final inspection before leaving the kill floor).

All in all, there are about thirty slaughter inspectors assigned to Cargill Meat Solutions in Schuyler, split between the day shift (6:08 A.M. to 2:38 P.M.) and the night shift (3:16 P.M. to 11:46 P.M.). Most have not been to



THE AUTHOR'S KNIVES AND MEAT HOOK.
PHOTOGRAPH BY TED CONOVER

² In February, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack warned that the federal budget sequester would soon lead to a partial furlough of USDA meat inspectors. This measure, which would have curtailed or even halted production, was narrowly avoided when Congress allowed the agency to divert \$55 million from elsewhere in its budget to pay inspectors.



college, but worked elsewhere in the meat industry, often on the line, before becoming inspectors. This is a definite step up: line jobs top out at about fifteen dollars an hour, while federal inspector jobs begin at that level and reach close to thirty dollars an hour plus overtime.

Most inspectors are men, but there are a few women. Even so, Carolina stands out from the group, which tends to be conservative in appearance and conduct. She wears a lot of mascara and eyeliner, a diamond stud below the left corner of her mouth; her long nails are fuchsia. Across the back of her jean jacket is her last name spelled out in shiny silver studs. She does not act demure or submissive in the least, and she mixes Spanish in with her English whenever possible—which I don't think everyone here likes. Men whistle at her in the plant, but not in the break room.

On our first day, we sit at the big table in the middle of the room, which is covered with sections of the *Omaha World-Herald* and bowls of microwave popcorn. Stan takes a Mountain Dew from the refrigerator and grabs a seat. He's in his forties, with a scraggly blond beard and a rangy build. He has a quick wit and likes to tease and provoke.

His buddy Hank sits across from him, doing the crossword puzzle from the paper. Tina, a bit younger and with young kids, tells me that her father was an inspector, too—she uses his old sharpening steel. She takes the job seri-

ously, augmenting or correcting the answers she hears the others give to my questions, and is the first to tell me about Red Meat School, a training camp for veteran inspectors.

Hard hats and scabbards are left in the locker rooms or around the edges of the break room—usually there's blood on them, so they don't often find their way to the table. Many people have decorated their hard hats with stickers. Tina's says, on one side, I'M NOT SURE I'M ENJOYING THIS.

While others read the paper, Carolina answers texts and talks on the phone. Often she speaks rather loudly, which annoys some of the inspectors. But she defuses this annoyance with her good-natured chatter and flirting. “Taylor, *qué pasó?*” “Perry, *cómo estás?*” The question of nicknames comes up—someone observes that though Carolina and I are both left-handed, Lefty has already claimed the moniker. Someone mentions that Perry's nickname is Spike and asks Carolina how you say that word (which she mishears as “Spark”) in Spanish.

“Chispa,” she answers.

“Cheese puff?” comes the reply. There is laughter. “Cheese puff—that fits you, Perry!”

“Or *chispita*,” she offers.

“Cheese pizza? Cheese pizza, Perry!”

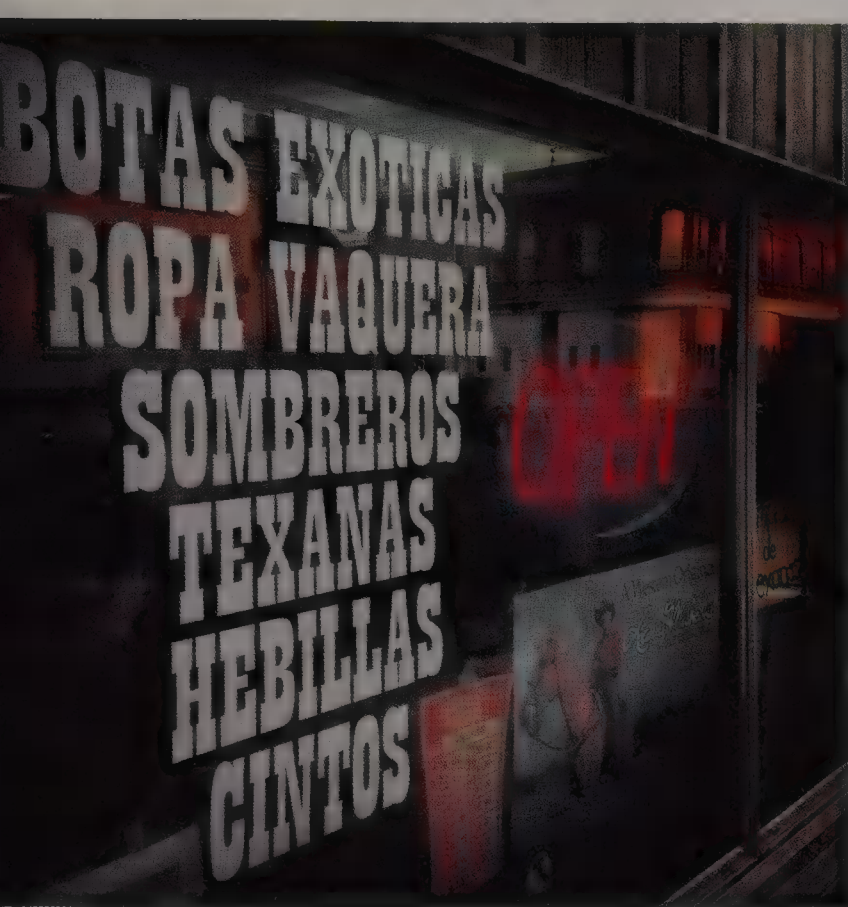
People start checking their stopwatches. Breaks last fifteen minutes and are staggered, and if you return

late to the floor, you will force other inspectors to cover for you. Ours is over, and I follow Stan to the viscera table.

This inspection post, which comprises both Livers and Pluck, is the most disturbing, and the most interesting, on the kill floor. Just upstream, the skinned carcasses have had their tails cut off. Now the chain carries them over a wide, flat, stainless-steel conveyor belt—the table—moving at exactly the same speed they do. On this belt stand workers in white rubber boots, who use their knives to slice open the body cavity and “drop” the organs at their feet.

There's a lot of steam (those innards are still hot) and splashing as the viscera hit the table with a plop. Using their gloved hands and booted feet, the workers nudge the big livers to one side of the table, and the pluck—the hearts, still connected to the lungs—to the other. A different worker, standing on the floor like us, flips and slides the massive livers so that they're right side up and properly presented to us for inspection.

It's a lot to take in, the river of organs flowing slowly by. The most dramatic parts, the large, bulbous stomachs in the middle, we're suppose to look at and touch but not dissect: most are full of the animal's last meal, generally corn but sometimes also hay—we see it on those occasions when the stomach gets nicked. We do gently prod



a spot called the ruminoreticular junction, where the cow's large first stomach meets the reticulum, a kind of filtering compartment. I'm not told what to look for, but I find something soon enough: a two-inch metal screw. Herb has explained that this part of the stomach "is like the bottom of a garbage pail"—the heavy, bad stuff settles here and sometimes gets stuck.

Another day, I notice a four-inch wire sticking out of the stomach near the junction. I assume that the wire, like the drops of oil and the odd bit of latex glove we occasionally find on the viscera table, came from upstream on the kill floor—a piece of some machine that got lodged in the cow. But Herb tells me it's much more likely that the animal ate the wire at some point in its life and lived with it jutting out of its stomach for some time. "Cows eat anything, and what they can't digest stays there," he explains. Also, he says, "they're tough." They can live with pain.

The inspection post on the livers side of the table is, in my opinion, the best, because livers are easy to cut. Using the smaller of our two knives—the "lamb skinner" or "liver knife"—we slice off a small lymph node with a soft filleting motion that, if done well, exposes a thin white bile duct. You know it's the bile duct because it's filled with a liquid as bright yellow as Stan's Mountain Dew. The second cut, with the sharp tip of the knife, is away from you and into the

bile duct, which you open to check for liver flukes. Tina shows me my first of these, a flat, slow-moving green thing about three quarters of an inch long with cilia all around the edge, like a huge paramecium, that got into the cow through its drinking water. She grabs the U.S. INSPECTED & CONDEMNED stamp, which sits in a well of blue ink attached to the side of the table, and stamps the liver once. That signifies to the workers downstream that the liver is not suitable for human consumption but is still okay for things like cat food.

A bigger problem you identify by moving your gloved hand over the liver's smooth surface, and by simply looking at it. With disturbing regularity, this inspection turns up evidence of an abscess, usually a big white bump visible or palpable just under the surface, as though there were an egg embedded there. If we detect an abscess, we stamp the liver twice, indicating that it should be disposed of.

Fifteen minutes on Livers 1, fifteen minutes on Livers 2, then it's time to move to Pluck 1 on the other side. We palpate the lungs and slice away the esophagus, exposing and cutting into two sets of lymph nodes. Next, and truly difficult for me, is slicing open the heart.

The hearts are wildly various, soft or firm, small as a cantaloupe or bigger than a honeydew. We are supposed to slice them open, then flip them over

and leave them flat. Practiced hands can do this with a single, graceful motion. Not mine. Unless you slice just the right way, the cardiac muscle fights back, requiring several strokes before it yields. And unless you cut in just the right place, the opened heart will not lie flat but instead stand up awkwardly. A proper first cut, which exposes all the heart's chambers, will often release a warm pond of blood. Practiced inspectors get none of this on them; a newbie, I'm sad to say, gets splashed all the time.

The hand you use makes a huge difference, and Stan, right-handed, had a hard time modeling lefty technique. Finally he placed his knife in his left hand. His graceful moves disappeared as he tried to figure it out; eventually, as though forgetting I was there, he got immersed in the point-of-view exercise. I imitated his motions as the other inspectors around the table watched. There was some shaking of heads.

"He still hasn't got it right."

Lefty and Stan agreed to swap trainees so that I might see it done more organically. Lefty was in his forties and had worked as an inspector since shortly after high school. He opened hearts one after another, making them look as sliceable as butter. Again and again I tried to imitate him. Slowly I improved. Just before it was time to swap positions, without knowing how or why it worked, I sliced a heart and it opened up as though I'd said a magic

word. Blood spilled across the stainless steel in front of me. “Yes,” I said, “yes.” I looked at Lefty. He smiled.

“One down,” he said, “a million to go.”

I had never heard of Schuyler, Nebraska, when I applied for an inspector job. I wanted to learn not only how meat is inspected, but how slaughter works. The demographic side of things also intrigued me. A century ago, packinghouses were located in big cities like Chicago, where the livestock arrived by rail. An elderly New York neighbor of mine once told me of seeing sheep driven through streets on the East Side of Manhattan, near the current site of the United Nations.

But by the 1950s, the packinghouses began moving to small-town America, where the livestock could arrive by truck. Schuyler got its beef plant in 1968, joining an eventual cohort of similar towns across cattle country: Grand Island, Lexington, and West Point, Nebraska; Dodge City, Garden City, Holcomb, and Liberal, Kansas; Fort Morgan and Greeley, Colorado. An American rural proletariat was born. Plants unionized and the workers made a good living: a typical wage in the 1970s was between seven and nine dollars per hour, well above the federal minimum.

But then salaries took a drop, and Latino workers started coming in. Schuyler had fewer than 200 Hispanic residents in 1990. Today there are more than 4,000, about two thirds of the town’s population. The demographic mix in most other beef-packing towns has also tilted Hispanic.

Once the FSIS approved my employment application, I was offered a post in Schuyler and accepted. Herb called me up a couple of weeks before I was due to report. We discussed what I’d need to bring and where I’d want to live. I’d probably find Columbus, where he and many other inspectors lived, most congenial, Herb thought. It was only about twenty minutes away and had plenty of stores and restaurants: “There in Schuyler, it’s mostly burritos and taco stands.”

But I wanted to live in Schuyler. It was surprisingly hard to find a place. Johnnie’s Motel (run by an enterprising man named Javier) offered temporary lodging and a good location, right next

to the town supermarket and Chona’s, a family Mexican restaurant that occupies a former Hardee’s. But I wanted a longer-term arrangement, and began to scan newspaper ads and bulletin boards. I was a day too late for a small house that the landlord had recently renovated: “I ended up renting it to some Mexicans. Wish you’d called earlier.” When I started asking around the USDA break room, however, the inspectors who lived in town—Stan, Lefty, a supervisor named Peter—started throwing out the names of Schuyler landlords.

One of these was named Sammy. “I think he might have something,” offered Lefty. “My uncle rents two units in his complex, and I think only one other is occupied. There’s eight units in all.”

By that evening, one of them was mine. Rent was \$300 a month. Sammy had once loved to ski, and the place, which he’d designed himself, had a rustic Seventies-era look. Roger, another of my co-workers, had lived there as a younger man. “It still got the wood paneling and shag rugs?” he asked. I nodded.

The building was located across town from the “pack,” as Sammy and everyone else called the plant. Its main disadvantage, which Sammy freely confessed, was that it was only two blocks from the railroad tracks that bisected Schuyler, and trains blew through, whistles screaming, at all hours of the day and night. (I told him that I actually liked the sound of trains.) The only tenant besides Lefty’s uncle was a freelance roofer in his seventies, whom I liked a lot.

“Why do you think Sammy leaves all these apartments vacant?” I asked a neighbor one evening.

“I think he doesn’t want to rent to Mexicans,” the man answered.

Carolina and I were approaching the end of our weeklong training period (my training would be extended because of my slower pace), and Herb had promised to show us the rest of the plant before we began working regular shifts. Hard hats donned and earplugs in, we walked to Fabrication.

“Fab” is the largest room in the plant, the place where the hanging carcasses, having spent two or three days cooling down in the tomblike “hot box” (which

is as cold as a refrigerator), are gradually disarticulated. The sides of beef—literally one side of a carcass—are first halved into forequarter and hindquarter. Then there is a further subdivision into salable cuts of meat.

The workers in Fab are mainly arrayed in long rows along parallel moving belts, and although the process is impressively automated, with all kinds of machinery cunningly crafted to present meat to the workers and then move it on its way, the main tool of production is the knife wielded by a human hand. From a catwalk, we observed the activity below: unlike the workers on the kill floor, the ones here were packed closely together, practically elbow to elbow, as they engaged in their repetitive motions. Most were Latino, with a smattering of very dark-skinned people, likely Somalis, and a few white people as well. (Cargill employs more than 2,000 workers at its Schuyler plant, and says they represent more than twenty nationalities.)

It was cold in here. Carolina shivered and crossed her arms. “I hated working in Fab,” she said, referring to her job at the kosher beef plant in Hastings. Indeed, most workers regard the kill floor, with its violence and rivers of blood, as preferable to Fab, purely on the basis of temperature.

Next we visited some specialty areas. In one room, large stainless-steel machines attended by technicians whirled and churned out masses of pink pellets; they looked like Tater Tots made out of meat. “Know what this is?” Herb asked us. “You heard of pink slime?”

This controversial beef filler had been in the news since the *New York Times* wrote about it in 2009. The meat industry calls it lean finely textured beef (LFTB) and boneless lean beef trimmings (BLBT), but its famous nickname comes from an FSIS microbiologist who dissented from his agency’s approval of it. Gerald Zirnstein wrote that the product was not beef but “salvage.” In an email to colleagues released to the *Times* as part of a Freedom of Information Act request, he added: “I do not consider the stuff to be ground beef, and I consider allowing it in ground beef to be a form of fraudulent labeling.” Meat companies are not required to disclose the use of ammonia gas to kill bacteria in pink slime. But publicity over how it was made turned

consumers away from ground-beef products and drastically hurt sales.

Next we descended to the basement and visited the rendering room, a smelly, dark space where the hides are processed in vats of liquid and begin their transformation into leather. On our way back, we stopped at Offal (divided into red and white), ducked under the heads chain, and passed through the double doors that lead to the small white-collar sector of the plant, walking through a little pool of soapy bubbles intended to cut the amount of grease people track out. Across the hall from the USDA break room, we made one final stop: Cargill's video-surveillance headquarters.

It was like stepping into another universe. The room was clean, quiet, and spotless, with a single technician sitting in an armchair before an array of monitors. On the screens were feeds from the cameras set up around the plant—the kill floor, Fab, the parking lots and loading docks, everything. At Herb's request, the technician showed how she could aim and zoom the cameras. She was not, she said, there to monitor the inspectors. Still, it was clear that she could watch us if she wanted to: she zoomed in on an inspector named Terry as he finished palpating a tongue and turned to rinse his knife in the sink.

"All of this goes to headquarters in Wichita, right?" asked Herb. Yes, she said, everything she saw was accessible at Cargill headquarters, and she was in regular touch with them, although about what, exactly, she declined to say.

Back in the break room, Doc Barbera asked whether we had any questions. Veterinarians run the inspection details at every plant (in fact, the FSIS is the country's largest single employer of veterinarians). Doc, as everyone called him, was a mild, grandfatherly man of measured responses. But when he asked what we had seen and I said the words "pink slime," it pushed a button.

"The publicity around that is just outrageous," he said. "The product is proven safe—it might be the safest thing in ground beef, because it's so thoroughly disinfected. All they do is clean it up with ammonia. It's been in hamburger for years. But now with all

the commentary, and the USDA taking it out of some school lunches, it's like a witch hunt. Plants have closed, hundreds of people have lost their jobs, and all because of politics and ignorance."

I was surprised that Doc was so unquestioning about the safety of industrial processes like treating meat with ammonia—Canada, for one, disallows meat that has been so treated. But his frustration with how seemingly irrational thinking in big cities can affect life in the country was something that came up again and again in Schuyler.

The next time was a couple of days later, during lunch break. Tina looked up from her magazine with a sigh of disgust. "Humanely treated, organic beef," she groaned, reading from the page. "What's that? And why would you think they go together? They're not the same."

Everyone nodded and chuckled. Later, I tried to tease out her objection. "Well, 'organic' is only about what they're fed," she explained. "It has nothing to do with the conditions of their lives. So what does 'humanely treated' even mean? Do you take them into a barn every night? Do you brush them and sing them a song? No cattle are raised that way! It's some city person's fantasy!" What seemed to get her goat, as it did Doc's, was that urban consumers with little knowledge of animal husbandry or the food industry could influence the whole rural economy simply by hopping on some politically correct bandwagon.

This is not to suggest, however, that the inspectors didn't care about animals. The next week, Lefty, sitting at the table, read aloud from the *World-Herald* about an undercover video of workers at a dairy farm in Idaho abusing animals. Peter, a supervisor sitting nearby at his computer, soon had the video on his screen, and ten or twelve inspectors gathered around to watch.

It was one of the more horrific videos produced by the advocacy group Mercy For Animals, showing workers twisting cows' tails, dragging them behind a tractor with a chain, hitting them on the head with a plastic cane, and trying to force one with a broken leg to walk. There were disapproving gasps and groans all around, and no minimizing it at all. "That makes me sick," said Tina.

I was feeling proud of the cohort when someone read aloud from the text on the webpage, which described how the workers would be prosecuted for their cruelty. An inspector named Jason piped up. "They're probably back in Mexico by now," he said derisively.

"What did you say?" asked Carolina, looking up from her mortadella sandwich. She had been pouring picante sauce directly into her mouth from the bottle after each bite.

"Oh, I'm just joking," he said.

Very slowly, I improved. My eye for meat got better—I began to understand what I was seeing. And, probably more important, I got better with a knife, and had a series of small breakthroughs. "You're pushing too much. Try slicing more," said Nick, watching me struggle on heads. "Stand closer to the tongue before you hook it. And hook straight down. Otherwise it'll start swinging." Right on target.

Keeping the knife-edge sharp was another key skill. I started to use my sharpening steel after every series of cuts, just like everybody else, and noticed that many inspectors kept a second steel or a sharpening stone at hand for those times when you needed more than a touch-up.

When was that? When your knife nicked your hook, for example, as mine did several times a day at first, mostly on heads. Or when your knife went all the way through the heart and struck the metal table. Even hitting bone seemed to dull the blade a little bit.

So I struggled, and experimented, and was helped by kind inspectors when things got overwhelming. They handed me their knives and worked on mine in the spare seconds between pieces of meat. They demonstrated how much better the steels worked if you used soap, and an abrasive pad to keep them clean, or gave me lessons on the long sharpening stone in the break room, which sat in its own reservoir of oil.

I knew I was getting better because I dulled my knife less often. And because I didn't have to replace my gloves as often. All of us wore latex gloves; on the hand that held the hook, we also wore a thin fabric no-cut glove underneath, which saved me from countless self-inflicted injuries. The slightest

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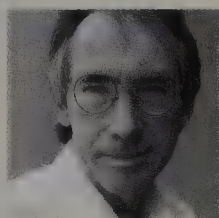
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nick, however, would cut the latex and let in water and blood. The first week, I replaced my gloves two or three times a day. By week three, some days I didn't have to replace them at all.

There was, however, another lesson I had yet to learn. I had quickly grown used to "stamping out" meat with ink or tagging it for disposal by Cargill management. But the real power for an inspector is the ability to stop the line. Every single inspection post has a big red button that lets you do just that.

Carolina and I received no special instruction on when to push the button, but obviously it is not a thing you do lightly. Stopping the line halts production, idling scores of workers and costing the company money. Nothing can proceed until the problem is resolved.

The first time I saw it done was Friday of my first week. Jason, working Pluck 3 across the table from me, pushed the button. I saw him gesture at the workers downstream from him, but he wouldn't talk to them—we'd received specific instructions about that. If something goes wrong, address the supervisor, not the worker who might be responsible.

The supervisor, a heavyset, sometimes surly man named Bano, approached Jason at a surprisingly leisurely pace. Jason described what he had seen out of the corner of his eye: a worker had dropped a liver to the floor. It should have been disposed of because of that. Instead, according to Jason, the man had rinsed it in the sink and returned it to the table, and because his gloved hands were not rinsed first, the liver stood a good chance of being contaminated. The worker denied the story. Jason stood firm. Bano, angry, found the liver, disposed of it, and cleaned the table around it. The line started back up. Elapsed time: a little under ten minutes.

Another time, Nick stopped the line while working on heads. He had noticed the third pair of lower teeth that indicate risk of BSE. Yet this head was not marked with blue ink, and the knocker's hole in its forehead had not been filled with a cork to stop the potential leakage of SRM: somebody—more than one person—had messed up. This stoppage lasted much longer, as various supervisors were called in. Doc later revealed in a staff meeting that the

incident had led him to "write up" the company with a document called a noncompliance report. This meant Cargill was required to investigate the incident and respond to the government, in writing, with an explanation and a plan to prevent similar lapses going forward. Doc told us not to be shy about stopping the line: "Make them get the supervisors out there. That's what'll really get their attention."

"Yeah," Russell chimed in. "Hit them in the wallet." (One inspector later told me that the cost to the company of stopping the line is about \$10,000 per minute.)

I was pleased to hear this little pep talk, evidence of the inspectors' integrity. Working inside Cargill, embedded in the plant (as well as in the community of the company town), one could imagine relations getting a bit too cozy for the public good. Doc would have none of it.

My own initiation into line stopping came two days later. I was nearing the end of my extended training period, in week two, working the post called the Rail. On each of this station's two platforms, an inspector stands beside a trimmer—a Cargill worker adept at trimming anything off a carcass that shouldn't be there before it makes its way to the hot box, including bruised tissue, fecal matter, little pieces of hide, and so forth.³ The job involves visual inspection and, on the Lower Rail, running one hand along a strip of peritoneum in search of abscesses. I was training with Taylor, an amiable guy who, like most inspectors, had gotten his start as a regular line worker at a beef plant—in his case, Omaha Steaks. Taylor had taped an MP3 player into his hard hat and was listening to music, but he immediately looked up when I pointed to a couple of rivulets of thin black liquid running down the hock.

"Stop the line!" he said, and I did.

³ Trimmers on the Rail, and in some other locations, wear chain mail over their torsos. As I would learn, this practice stemmed from an accident in 2000, when a worker in Fab named Jesus Soto Carbajal was "dropping rounds"—cutting heavy round steaks out of hanging carcasses. His knife apparently slipped out of his hand just as the round steak dropped, and the weight of the steak drove the blade into his chest, killing him. This was, as far as I heard, the only work-related death to take place inside the Schuyler facility.

Foremen jogged up the stairs to our level of the platform. Their best guess was that oil had dripped down from a newly lubricated chain. In any case, the trimmer reached up and cut off the contaminated parts, while other workers were dispatched to wipe off the rail upstream, using long poles with rags attached to them.

This was deeply satisfying—but not as good as the stoppage about a month later. That one, which lasted so long that they sent everybody to lunch, workers and inspectors alike, was initiated by Peter, a supervising inspector. He had noticed that the floor drain in the transfer hall leading from the kill floor to the hot box had backed up, creating a pool of dirty water. The carcasses on the chain passed right over the pool, and anything that dripped down could splash back up and contaminate the meat. I asked Peter whether it was hard to shut down the plant that way. Not at all, he said. Doc would always back him up, or any of us.

Still, I knew there would always be human error. One day I confessed to Herb that I had gotten so jammed up at Pluck 3 that I failed to cut open a heart as it passed by. Hadn't I just endangered the food supply?

Herb told me not to do that again—but also not to worry. "If there's a problem, somebody will catch it," he assured me, by which he meant either a regular line worker or a "QA": a Cargill quality-assurance employee. Cargill, after all, was also concerned with the wholesomeness of its product. One day I heard a fellow inspector opine that, in some ways, we were just another layer of QA. Herb seemed to be saying the same thing—that there was some redundancy built into the system, more than one chance to catch a problem.

On the other hand, inspectors are savvy enough to know that even when they do good work, their presence is less central to food safety than it once was. Visual and tactile inspection is important, but, as one inspector put it to me, "You don't need shit to have bacteria." To a large degree, the detection of invisible pathogens has now become the primary task.

Eric Schlosser, the author of *Fast Food Nation*, told me that all the major fast-food chains now have strict standards for the levels of pathogens

they'll accept from their suppliers. The meatpacking companies conform to them or lose the ability to sell meat to these major customers. To date, however, companies have successfully blocked proposals to let the USDA set similar standards.

Why, asks Schlosser, are meatpackers "willing to do for their big fast-food customers what they won't do for the USDA and the average American consumer? If we ever get food-safety reform at the USDA, the agency will be able to set standards for various pathogens in meat, test widely for them, and order mandatory recalls or impose tough punishments when the rules are broken."⁴

Shift's end, and a fast walk to the USDA men's locker room. The narrow space quickly filled with exhausted bodies not too tired to crack jokes: about men bending over, about that one Latina trimmer, about the lameness of the Kansas State football team. (The night-shift veterinarian was a K-State diehard transplanted to Husker country.) Locker doors swung open and we had company while undressing: glossies of buxom, naked women. Or, on one door, Hillary Clinton's head photoshopped onto the body of a strapping female wrestler barely contained by her red-white-and-blue singlet. My locker was near the hamper for dirty uniforms, and I watched and ducked as, bloodied and balled up, the clothing flew in from up to twenty feet away. Each flight marked the revelation of another inspector's body. It was a cross section of body types you could have found almost anywhere—a few guys physically fit, but most far from it. Why, I wondered, were these so surprising to behold? Why did the images of wide hairy backs or fat white stomachs stick in my brain as I walked through the parking lot to my car and sometimes for hours afterward?

I think it was because undressed and goofing around, we no longer looked like government employees: GS-5s, GS-7s, and GS-9s. Dressed in hats and uniforms, we were the trained overseers of a specialized industrial process. But naked, we resembled something else: a

⁴ The USDA's recall orders are technically voluntary. In practice, however, the government's ability to persuade is powerful, and companies almost never decline.

group of predators (a pack, you might say) presiding over the slaughter of vast herds far too numerous for us to eat ourselves. The genius and horror of humanity was our ability to send the spoils to anonymous others of our kind located states and continents away. In the locker room you could see us as naked apes, as hominids killing cows; industrial slaughter is predation writ large.

"How are you doing?" Carolina asked me at the end of the first week. "The first time I worked with a knife, my hands hurt so much at night they kept me awake. I couldn't put them under a pillow, only on top."

I must be made of tougher stuff, I thought. My forearms were sore, but nothing worse than after a day of, say, tennis and yard work.

My self-congratulation was premature. During my second week, I was awoken by pain in my right forearm—my hook arm. I must have been sleeping on it, I thought, adjusting it and trying to drift off again. I couldn't. The pain was sharp, throbbing. I took Advil, which helped a little.

The next night it happened again, but this time to my left arm as well. Over the next few days and nights, I found myself unable to remove socks with my right hand—the pain in the thumb was excruciating. That entire hand, especially between the thumb and index finger, was now perpetually swollen. My fingertips tingled constantly unless they were completely numb, which they now were every morning when I woke up.

I started asking about pain at work and found that people had a lot to say—in a terse kind of way. Taylor, with more than fifteen years on the job, told me he took three Advils before every shift. Stan said, "It's worst at the beginning." Lefty said, "Everybody's got it." I overheard Janet discussing her recent cortisone shot, which had been helpful but failed to alleviate the pain in her little finger. Herb, I noticed, had a lot of surgical scars on his right arm, and his wrist didn't look quite right. "Yeah, had surgery to remove bone that had built up in there," he said. "Try ice."

Hearing me quiz the others, Janet realized I was serious about the question. "Have you tried wearing a wrist

brace at night?" she asked. I hadn't and told her I didn't see how that would help, since my arms weren't moving much then, but she urged me to try one anyway. So that day after work, I set off to find a brace for my right wrist, the one that hurt the most.

I went to Columbus, everyone's destination when it came to consumer choice. The Walgreens there sold five kinds of braces, but two were out of stock. I bought one that looked sturdy and proceeded to Walmart. The selection there was even larger, and included a more lightweight variety with pink lining, just for women. Clearly the demand for wrist braces was substantial around here. I bought a second one and put it on the minute I got home.

The relief was almost immediate. I tried to understand why and concluded that the brace must ease pressure on the carpal tunnel, even while I was sleeping. But other problems remained. Gripping anything with my right hand was painful, probably because I used that hand for flipping livers: they were slippery and weighed upward of twenty pounds, so I had to grab each one hard. Other movements caused particularly sharp pain in my left elbow, which I guessed was the result of wielding the knife on heads. Everything was worse in the morning, which made it hard to twist the shower faucet or hold a cereal spoon.

And yet I felt guilty complaining about it, and even about acknowledging it at first. Most workers had it much, much worse. Whatever motions were causing my pain at the plant, I never had to perform them for more than seventy-five minutes straight—that's how long inspectors spent at a stint on Heads. By contrast, most regular Cargill workers, on the kill floor and in Fab, had to repeat a single motion for an entire shift: eight hours, with only two breaks. Turnover in the meat industry is said to be extremely high. Pain and these kinds of deep, bloodless injuries have to be a main reason why.

Stan picked me up in his truck after dinner to give me a ride to the pool league at Bootleggers Bar & Grill. At Walgreens that day I'd bought a tube of heat rub and worked it into both hands.

Stan sniffed the air. "What's that?" "Bengay."

"Bengay?" He took his eyes off the road and looked at me sideways. "Pussy!"

This was my second appearance in the pool league. The first had gone unexpectedly well, mostly because two of my four opponents in the round-robin had the decency to self-destruct when shooting for the eight ball. So Stan had called me back and even lent me his extra cue.

The team was mainly inspectors: Stan, Hank, and Rick, a supervisory inspector at the Cargill grinding plant—a hamburger factory—in Columbus. There was also a toothless old farmer, Eric, who lived a few miles out of town. He wore a dirty cap and Larry King glasses, and his jeans, barely hanging on to his ass, hadn't been washed in ages. Many of his comments seemed to be about "bitches," but his lack of teeth made them hard to understand.

The bar was busy—but lest I get the wrong impression, my companions informed me that it was one of only five left out of thirty-one that had graced the town in the 1970s and 1980s. The clientele was non-Hispanic, with two exceptions. Our opponents' team included a Ford mechanic born in Guatemala—he was new in town and filling in for a regular—and the bartender himself was Hispanic. (Schuyler has one Hispanic bar, the Latino Club, active mostly on weekends.)

Between turns at the pool table, I chatted with the Guatemalan mechanic, and then got caught up in a conversation with a middle-aged guy sitting at the bar. When I mentioned that I worked as a USDA inspector at the pack, he asked, "Seven or nine?"

For a moment I was puzzled. Then I realized that he was asking my federal GS number—in other words, how much money I made. The fact was that I was neither a GS-9 nor a GS-7 but a GS-5—a truly humble status for a fifty-four-year-old. As a newcomer with no previous meatpacking experience, I did have the perfect excuse, but I felt oddly reluctant to share that with him. Instead I said, "Seven," which is what I would be if I stuck it out for two years. He still looked sorry for me.

My luck didn't hold that night: despite two brilliant, erratic beginnings, I botched several easy shots and lost

all four of my games. Stan's team would now fall in the league standings. Embarrassed, I apologized and decided to walk home.

It was 11:00 P.M. on a cold, clear night. Bootleggers was the only place open downtown, with all the parked cars clustered in front of it. Though I had to get up early, I felt in no particular hurry to get home, so I walked around.

Like so many Nebraska small towns, Schuyler had been very different when young: a place with aspirations to grow bigger, but in the meantime to do small right. The seat of Colfax County, Schuyler has a handsome four-story courthouse built in 1921 with terracotta and stone trim and a monument to World War I soldiers on its lawn. The post office, two blocks away and almost twenty years younger, is less prepossessing, but has high ceilings and a WPA mural of wild horses in the moonlight on one wall.

The Schuyler of old has been memorialized by the town's historical society in a museum, located in an old commercial building between the courthouse and the post office. The museum is a large place, chilly in early winter, packed with memorabilia of generations of German, Bohemian, and other immigrants. When I was there, three elderly volunteers were keeping it alive; the name of a fourth had recently been whited out from a sign in the window.

The museum was seldom open, but I'd gone three times, often to look through a collection of scrapbooks in three-ring binders. One was titled "Blizzards and Floods: Traumas That Folks Want to Remember." As I learned from Nadine Beran, the curator, the Platte River, more than a mile away, had repeatedly flooded the very street we were on. There were photos and newspaper articles showing submerged fields, houses, and railroad tracks.

I asked Beran what sorts of materials she had on the meatpacking plant, Schuyler's largest employer for more than forty years. I was particularly interested in the labor unrest that had convulsed the town in the 1970s. After poking around, Beran was able to produce only a photo of the pack's groundbreaking ceremony in 1967 and a company brochure from the 1980s. She had no explanation for the



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paucity of slaughterhouse stuff in the otherwise overflowing museum. This made me conclude that labor unrest is a trauma that folks want to forget.

The meat workers had voted to strike in 1971 over wages and in sympathy with strikers at other plants in the area. The owners vowed to keep the pack going with replacement workers. Scabs and union members battled it out, shots were fired, and the National Guard closed Highway 30. There was friction in town as well, particularly along B Street, home to Bootleggers and several other bars. "Families were against families," I was told by Thom Greenwood, who later worked in the pack and is now a vice president of Local 293 of the United Food and Commercial Workers. "If you were management and your brother wasn't, you couldn't talk to him."

"There was some people downtown who got thrown through some windows," said Bob Blum. He was twenty-six at the time of the strike, and had his leg broken near B Street when he was struck by a car driven by non-union workers. "They just swerved over and hit me. There was four in the car, I knew two of them." Blum spent a month in the hospital in traction, a month at home in a body cast, and "basically had to get a new knee put in." Had he pressed charges, sought redress? "I didn't want to stir up nothing," he told me. "I get along with a couple of them now."

The next labor trauma, though much less violent, had a more profound effect. Land O'Lakes, which owned the plant in 1984, told workers that their wages would be cut from \$10.69, then the standard rate across much of the industry, to a dollar less. Schuyler wasn't the only place this was happening; IBP, a major beef producer, went first, and its competitors all followed suit. But when workers in Schuyler refused to accept this cut, the plant was closed. And when it reopened eighteen months later, it was with a new owner and no union, and the wage had been reduced not just by one dollar an hour but by \$2.50.

Some workers went back, tails between their legs. Others left town. Meanwhile, Schuyler changed. Clarkson TV & Appliance, the store next to

Bootleggers, became Tienda Chichihualco, a Latin grocery store named after the little town in southern Mexico from which many early immigrants had come. The old Ben Franklin across the street became Variedades La Chiquita, filled with goods from Guatemala. The former location of Didier's, still the largest supermarket in town, was around the corner and now hosted the Latino Club.

At times, new arrivals got the cold shoulder, or worse. On March 4, 1995, nearly 600 workers who had reported to the pack for a special extra night shift discovered they'd been set up: the shift was a pretext for a raid by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Exits were closed, guarded by armed men, and 133 workers were arrested and soon deported, the majority to Mexico. Word of the raid spread quickly, and managers soon found themselves about seventy-five additional workers short. (The feds later revealed that they had struck a deal with plant management: they would stage their raid outside of regular hours and avoid disrupting production if management would help lure workers to the fake shift.)

Local 293, meanwhile, has not staged a major labor action in years. Some 1,300 people at the Schuyler plant are still unionized. And Greenwood says the union sticks up for its members: "Somebody gets screwed, we'll take them all the way to court." But strikes, as he explains, are another thing: why walk off the job to ensure some old-timer's vacation pay if you may lose your job the next week in a Homeland Security raid? Still, says Greenwood, the passage of time has strengthened the union's hand, as the first wave of Latino immigrants becomes more established in Schuyler: "A lot of them are staying put. They've become citizens, they're second-generation, and so tomorrow means something for them now."

As I entered my second month at Cargill Meat Solutions, I finally was able to keep my knife sharp (most of the time, anyway). And aided by painkillers, I tended not to feel the hurt in my arms after midmorning. Yet it scared me to push through it every day. Carolina showed me a painful lump that had developed on her forearm,

some kind of knot. "I live with it," she said, sounding only slightly less macho than Stan. Pain was part of the deal. As I became more familiar with managing it and gained a small degree of mastery over the rest of the job, I began to relax a bit.

Some days I even got bored. I certainly wasn't the only one: looking across the viscera table, more than once I saw Lefty essentially fall asleep on his feet. He was so acclimated to the routine that, between cutting up every third pluck as it passed in front of him, he appeared to be taking a nap in six-second increments. His eyelids would close, his mouth would sag open, and then he'd snap to attention and reach for the next pluck.

I never could have managed that. But I must have fallen into some sort of semicomatose state the day the dead dog appeared on the viscera table, or I would never have registered such profound shock.

"What the fuck!" I blurted as the damp gray thing, a whippet or small greyhound, presented itself in front of me. It looked like my dog back in New York, if he were gray and had just taken a bath and, well, drowned. Then I noticed the animal's feet: there were no toes, no claws, only little hooves. I pointed at it with my knife.

"Fetus," said Taylor, my trainer that day. "Or embryo. Whatever."

"How often do you see those?"

"Oh, every once in a while. Usually they're still inside the uterus." That was when I realized that the sacs of varying size that periodically passed before us, usually with something lumpy within, were the wombs of pregnant cows. Supposedly the plant butchered only steers (castrated bulls) and heifers (female cows that have not borne a calf). But clearly the screening system was less than perfect. The sight of the fetus reminded me of the pro-life billboards I'd seen along the highway, equating abortion to murder.

When I asked Doc Barbera about the fetus, he told me they were extremely valuable. "They send them to a special room and then take out their blood," he said. Fetal bovine serum, I later learned, is prized by biotechnology labs, which use it for in vitro cell culture, and can sell for \$500 per liter.

I wasn't bored for the rest of the day.

Lefty had looked vaguely amused at my shock—he appreciated anything that helped the time go by. Whereas Stan favored the off-color joke, Lefty concocted more dramatic high jinks to keep his brain alive. On Heads, for instance, he sometimes cut an eyeball from its socket and tried bouncing it off the floor, the wall, and back into his hand. At the viscera table, he'd sometimes spy a swollen ovary—they could present as a pellucid blue, the size of a softball—and launch it into the air toward somebody he knew.

His most notorious prank, though, I'd already been warned about. More than once, in his trusted role as a senior inspector, Lefty had suggested that a trainee slice into a severely swollen abscess—the kind that would burst open when nicked, covering the trainee with pus. But as it happened, I accomplished this on my own. I was on Heads, slicing without thinking, when I set off a small explosion. Suddenly I was covered with slime the color of key-lime-pie filling, aghast at the putrescence of it. The four inspectors upstream paused to take it in. Two were mirthful, two disgusted.

"Oh my God," I said. I wiped my face on my sleeve, then grabbed a handful of paper towels and started trying to clean myself off.

"You know what?" said Peter, the supervisor who happened to be working next to me. "Don't even bother." He stifled a grin. "Go to the locker room and change. We'll cover for you." I thanked him and apologized.

"Don't feel bad," he replied, finally allowing himself a chortle. "It happens to everybody at least once. You're a real inspector now."

Other aspects of the pack gradually became less mysterious to me. I saw how the guy with the giant metal box was actually swapping out dull knives for sharp ones. How the different sirens that sounded throughout the day had different meanings, summoning different supervisors. How those colored lightbulbs high on the ceiling reflected the status of the line, and how the different colors of hard hats among Cargill workers denoted rank.

One day I became aware of a tall woman in a white lab coat who sometimes stood off to the side at Livers. In



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one hand she held a clipboard and in the other a pen. I knew she wasn't an inspector, and since we weren't subject to review or supervision by anyone at Cargill, I wasn't concerned. Still, she *was* looking at us. Then Tina, working next to me one day, asked if we could swap positions "so that I can talk to Mary Ann."

"Sure. Who's Mary Ann?" Tina pointed to the woman in the lab coat.

While Tina chatted with Mary Ann, I thought about another pattern I had noticed: the way animals passed through the factory in groups. Mid-morning, for example, you might notice that the severed heads had become extra large, their flesh hard to cut, and somebody would say, "Yeah, they switched from Black Angus to Holsteins." But even within a specific breed, you would see patterns of difference, especially on the viscera table.

For me, it was most noticeable in the livers. Typically I'd find an abscess in, say, one out of every eight livers. But then there would come a streak of them just riddled with abscesses—sometimes you had to mark out almost every one. Not only that, but in the middle of these streaks you might see grotesque and creepy things: deformed livers hardly looking like livers at all, or tumors jutting out of other kinds of viscera. This diseased tissue sometimes made you feel as if you should stop breathing and take a step back, or sterilize not only your knife but also your hook and your hard hat, and maybe get a new pair of latex gloves and take a shower as well.

When it was time for us to rotate posts, I asked Tina about Mary Ann. "What's she doing there?" I yelled, so she could hear me.

"Oh, she works for the feedlots. She keeps track of how many livers we mark out. It's correlated to the antibiotics or something."

I asked Mary Ann about it during a line stoppage the following week. "I work for Eli Lilly," she told me.

"The drug maker?"

"Right. I keep track of how many livers inspectors mark out with abscesses, and they use it to monitor the use of antibiotics in the feed."

"How do you mean? The more antibiotics, the more abscesses?"

"That's right."

I paused and thought. "But wouldn't antibiotics make the abscesses go away?"

Mary Ann smiled. "I guess not!"

Somehow this was worse than seeing shit on the meat or ingesta leaking out of a ruptured stomach. It wasn't contamination from an isolated slaughtering mishap: it was deliberate, systemic contamination of the food chain. As much as 70 percent of all antibiotics sold in the United States are administered to livestock—they are a powerful way to ensure animal growth. I knew this had to be a dangerous practice, because overuse of antibiotics leads to resistance on the part of bacteria. It ultimately robs these medicines of their power.

What I hadn't known was that consumption of these drugs makes so many cattle sick. That was morally unsettling, of course. But it was equally unsettling in terms of what we eat. Can the chemicals that overwhelm a cow's liver also be present in an otherwise healthy-looking cut of beef, in a steak we might eat? If they can, USDA inspectors won't be the ones to detect such contamination: they're not trained to look for it.

Stan didn't seem too surprised when I told him I was quitting. I'd been an oddball candidate from the beginning: a New Yorker who had showed up in Nebraska for a job as an intermittent inspector—fifteen dollars an hour and no benefits. It was also unusual to qualify for the FSIS with a four-year college degree—most people came in with two years of experience in food handling—and Stan knew my educational background.

Working on Heads one day, I almost choked when he suddenly asked me where I had gone to college. Not wanting to lie to him, I said I would fill him in later. He never did press me for details, but on our break that afternoon, he said, "You're the first guy I ever met who finished college and doesn't brag about it. Most of the people here who had some college"—and he named a couple of names—"they really want you to know."

I told him I missed my family, which was true; that the work was tougher than I'd thought, which was true; and that there were prospects for a job teaching, which was true. I didn't tell him that I no longer had any feeling in

my fingertips each morning, or that I wore a brace at night to alleviate carpal-tunnel pain. I knew how he felt about complainers. I also didn't tell him about my plan to write an article—but I will have before this comes out, and I hope and suspect that he will forgive me and let me buy him a meal next time we meet, because I owe him one.

Here is why: for weeks, Stan had been wanting to take me to his favorite place for a steak, and suddenly it was now or never. Slaughterhouse work didn't seem to turn any inspectors away from eating meat (one man I met who had worked in a hot-dog factory still ate hot dogs). And if freshness is a virtue in beef, you couldn't get any fresher than "hanging tenders": slender strips of meat cut from a carcass on the Rail, placed in a ziplock bag with spices, cooked in a sanitizer, and discreetly shared with all and sundry during breaks.

I figured Stan would know a good steak when he saw one, and part of me really wanted to go. We scheduled it for the night before I was to leave Schuyler. Stan and his wife, Josephine, picked me up at dusk in their SUV and pointed me to a seat in back with a little cooler next to it. "Have yourself a beer," said Stan, who already did.

"Thanks," I said. I was grateful for the beer because I was nervous. Although Stan didn't know it, I hadn't eaten any beef at all since the day I started at the pack. Seeing the knocker at work was part of the problem. So was standing near the cattle as they were herded up Temple Grandin's doomsday ramp. And then there were the heads, eyeballs intact, and the highly rationalized industrial setting, the idea of a powerful enterprise devoted to wholesale killing. And if you believe that animals might have souls—sometimes I do—then you might relate to my mental picture of a spiritual highway spiraling upward from the knocking room, through the ceiling of Cargill Meat Solutions, and into bovine heaven, with a constant stream of cattle arriving every day.

That was the spiritual side of the equation. There was also, on a more practical level, the question of wholesomeness. What I'd seen on the viscera table made me suspect that consumers

could be getting quite a dose of pharmaceuticals with their beef.

You were never really in the clear unless you went completely organic. Beyond that, it seems smart to avoid ground beef. Most *E. coli* contamination comes out of grinding plants, where the provenance of the meat can be practically anywhere in the hemisphere and the standards are often lower. Grinding conceals almost all the sins.

But our dinner wasn't going to be about hamburger. Stan said the restaurant was out of town, and I found no trace of it on Google or Yelp or anywhere else: in rural Nebraska, thank God, it's still possible to get off the e-grid.

Because I'd like to keep it that way, I will not name the restaurant or its location here. I will say that it was in one of those little Nebraska towns that time forgot. The roads were unpaved, the brick schoolhouse was abandoned; apparently there had been a flood. Main Street had no streetlights, and the only business showing any sign of life was our steak house. But it was roomy, with a long bar, two TVs going, a pool table, and an area for dining.

I'd finished two beers before we walked in. Stan and Josephine knew several people (and I actually knew a guy from my first pool night), so it took a little while before we sat down and considered the menu.

"Rib eyes, right?" Stan asked Josephine, and she nodded. As he had promised, the rib eye dinner was \$14.95 and came with Texas toast, potato, and salad. Stan ordered his medium, Josephine medium rare, and he asked for the Dorothy Lynch—a local brand of French dressing—on his salad.

I looked down the menu. My stomach turned slightly. "I'll have exactly what he ordered," I told the waitress. We asked for beers all around, too.

My phone was sitting on the table and Josephine asked if I had any pictures of my kids. I showed them. I'd seen a photo of a Hispanic girl on Stan's locker door at work, and now I asked about her.

"That's my granddaughter," said Stan proudly. "My little beaner baby." "Say what?"

Josephine smiled. "My daughter from my first marriage married a Mexican."

"Oh, like Mickey," I said.

Mickey was a trimmer who often worked on the Rail. He was very talkative. His daughter had married a Mexican, he once told me, and they'd ended up moving in with him and his wife. It had been hard, he said—he was one of the workers locked out in 1984 who had come back to a lower wage. Mexicans, to him, were the embodiment of all that had gone wrong: the decline in his salary, and the transformation for the worse of his beloved Schuyler.

For a long time, he had been very angry. If he saw a Mexican walking into town from the plant, he would refuse to pick him up: "I'd say, 'Go ahead, get frostbite, die!'" But that was then. "Now, if I know them, I'd help," he said. "And they'd help me." A key moment in the transformation had been the arrival of his granddaughter.

Stan said it was the same for him. "Sure, we were a little racist before. But Mickey and me don't let nobody say the B-word. We say 'beaner baby' among ourselves, but that's because people know how we really feel."

And so the heartland changes.

The meals arrived. I've never been a particular fan of rib eye, but from the moment I saw the steak and caught its aroma, my stomach felt fine. I watched Stan and Josephine lift bites to their mouths and chew. I salivated. I lifted my knife and pushed in my fork.

The next ten or fifteen minutes were an intense pleasure. It is hard to describe how good that steak was. I finished mine first. "You must have liked that," said Stan.

"Wow. It was delicious."

But meanwhile, I was thinking: What did this mean? What kind of witness was I, what kind of predator? I know that going vegan is perhaps the proper ending to my story, and truly, it's the one I foresaw. But appetite is a hard thing to control; a lifetime habit doesn't just go away. I do know that I eat much less beef than I did before, and I pay more for better stuff. I have subtracted 90 percent of the hamburger from my diet, and I now seek meat that requires a knife to eat. It will be better meat—and using the knife will mean I have to think about it, every single bite. ■

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LIGHT, SW

A former U.S. ambassador peddles in

The report itself looks fairly innocuous. In 2010, after the Afghan Ministry of Mines began planning for a tender—a request for bids—on a contract to drill for oil in the Amu Darya Basin, it asked for an independent “transparency review” of the process. The amount of oil is relatively small: the contract area, which lies near Afghanistan’s northern border, is estimated to hold about 80 million barrels, and the country as a whole is thought to have reserves of about 1.6 billion barrels—roughly the amount that Saudi Arabia produces every five months. Nevertheless, the stakes are high. The United States government has spent ten years trying to open Afghanistan to private foreign investment; the tender was supervised by the Pentagon’s Task Force for Business and Stability Operations. The Amu Darya project will mark the first time since the Soviet era that a major foreign oil company has operated in Afghanistan, and if Afghans are actually going to benefit from the development of their oil fields, they will need to do a better job of negotiating contracts than have other resource-rich countries in the developing world.

To the chagrin of one of the largest Western oil companies involved, Tethys Petroleum, the contract went to China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC). This is the second major resources contract to be awarded by Afghanistan to China—in 2007, the state-owned Metallurgical Corporation of China was granted a thirty-year lease on the country’s largest known copper deposit. With funding from the Pentagon, the Ministry of Mines hired the Marx Group, a Virginia-based consulting firm, to conduct the independent review. Marx specializes in helping the governments of poor nations attract foreign investment. In the report, they deemed the tender both fair and transparent. CNPC offered a royalty rate of 15 percent to the Afghan government—well above the 4 percent bid by Tethys, and the highest overall. Marx’s review, however, does mention one troubling irregularity: an individual identified in the report as “a former U.S. government official” had pressured the Afghan government to award the contract to Tethys despite the better terms offered by CNPC.

Upon investigating, I discovered that the U.S. official in question was Zalmay Khalilzad, former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Iraq, and the U.N. under President George W. Bush. Khalilzad had attempted to persuade the Afghan minister of mines, Wahidullah Shahrani, to change the decision of the Contract Evaluation Team (CET). Because Khalilzad, who was born in Afghanistan, is considered a leading candidate for the Afghan presidency in 2014, few people involved in the bidding process would speak about his actions on the record. But I obtained copies of the correspondence—three emails and a message sent via BlackBerry—discussed in the Marx Group’s review but never made public. Well before the CET’s decision was announced, Khalilzad wrote to Shahrani that he had heard “disturbing reports” about the outcome of the tender and warned that “it [would] not reflect well on the Ministry” if CNPC were to get the contract. Khalilzad was acting as Tethys’s representative through his consulting firm, Gryphon Capital Partners, but it is clear from the messages that he’s trading on the political capital of the United States government. The original “formal letter of protest” mentioned by the Marx Group was received on August 2, 2011; copies were apparently sent to Afghan president Hamid Karzai and minister of finance Omar Zakhilwal.

Amu Darya Oil Tender Process and Transparency Final Report

Public Disclosure
of the Tender Process



Prepared for the
Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
H.E. Wahidullah Shahrani, Minister of Mines

The Marx Group
CONSULTING

Prepared by The Marx Group
Independent Review

20 December 2011

6.3.2. The Minister of Mines and Petroleum in his letter cited the letter cited the letter. The letter requested the Minister of Mines and Petroleum to respond to the protest letter and to be considered of all aspects.

The existence of that information was not in the proceedings, scoring.

While the breach of the protest in a transparent manner.

⁷ See Section 9.3.3 for a detailed description of the Law written in Dari. This inconsistency is acceptable.

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T, CRUDE

e in Afghanistan, by Antonia Juhasz

Khalilzad has devoted much of his career in public service to bringing foreign oil companies to Afghanistan and Iraq. Now that he's in the private sector, he's cashing in. Tethys, which is registered in the Cayman Islands but was spun off from the U.S. company CanArgo Energy, was pursuing the Amu Darya contract as part of a larger investment across the border in Tajikistan. The contract for those resources was finalized in 2008, on terms remarkably favorable to Tethys, particularly in comparison with a Tajik contract signed the same year with Russia's Gazprom. (In 2012, Khalilzad joined the Tethys board and was issued options for 43,400 company shares.) In his response to Khalilzad's protest letter, Minister Shahrani wrote that although Tethys was looking for terms similar to those it had secured in "other Central Asian countries," "I would like to state that the system in those countries is pretty much different than our system where we have more standard procedures." Khalilzad only hinted at the possible political consequences of choosing CNPC over Tethys, but Shahrani made clear that he understood the "strategic implications on Afghanistan" (emphasis in the original).

In his letter, Khalilzad argued that those evaluating the bids had ignored CNPC's "horrible record in Africa and throughout the developing world" and pointed to a potential conflict of interest: Afghanistan's deputy minister of public works was on the board of CNPC's local partner company, the Watan Group. In his response, Shahrani rejected claims that CNPC had poor environmental and human rights records (although it would be more accurate to say that CNPC is no worse than any other oil company) and deadpanned that he was "happy to report" that the deputy minister of public works was no longer affiliated with the Watan Group. He reiterated that the reason Tethys's bid had been rejected was the low royalty rate and added that there were "serious concerns on the competence of Tethys," including its unwillingness to commit adequate capital to carry out its contractual obligations in Amu Darya. Last year, Tethys president David Robson proved that the company's attitude toward CNPC had evolved since the tender: he called it a "world-class company" and announced that Tethys would partner with CNPC to finance its operations in Tajikistan.

In his protest letter, Khalilzad refers to confidential findings of the CET that had not yet been formally submitted to the Afghan government. An official with intimate knowledge of the proceedings told me that Khalilzad had paid for this information—which, if true, could amount to an illegal bribe under Afghanistan's Hydrocarbons Law and the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. (The official asked that his name not be disclosed.) Shahrani told Khalilzad that it was "disturbing" that representatives from Tethys were attempting to influence the bidding process. When that attempt failed, Khalilzad was anything but abashed: he took to the pages of *Foreign Policy* to decry the outcome as a failure of U.S. policy. Whether the CNPC contract will ever benefit the people of Afghanistan is an open question. But Shahrani assured Khalilzad that the decision would prove "correct, fair and in the best interest of Afghanistan"—though not, perhaps, in the best interest of the former U.S. ambassador. ■

Antonia Juhasz is a fellow at the Investigative Reporting Program at the University of California's Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. Her most recent book is *Black Tide: The Devastating Impact of the Gulf Oil Spill*.

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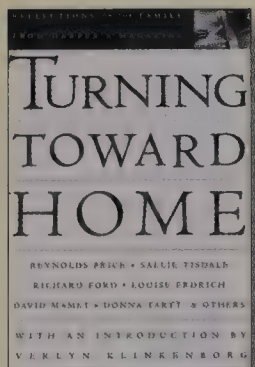
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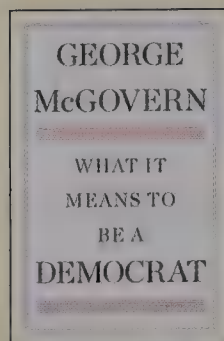
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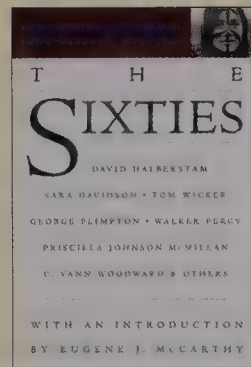
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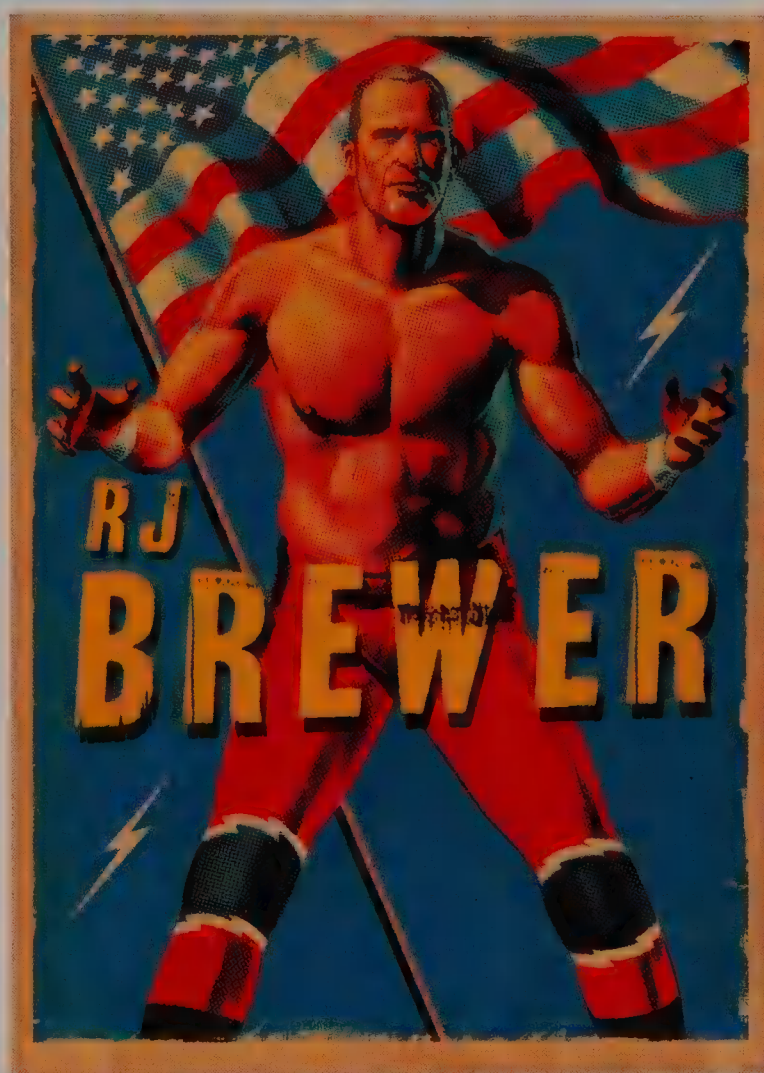
JINGO UNCHAINED

Mexican wrestling's all-American villain

By Michael Brick

The spit of land at the mouth of the Nueces River defied five settlement parties before 1839, when a Yankee speculator, Colonel Henry Lawrence Kinney, demonstrated the benefits of illegal trade across the new border separating Texas from Mexico. The colonel, who'd awarded himself that rank for unspecified actions performed in Florida's Seminole Wars, would go on to pursue a colorful career that included charges of treason and election to the Texas congress before he died in a gunfight in Matamoros. Despite the intercession of a devastating hurricane in 1919, Kinney's Nueces outpost grew to become present-day Corpus Christi, a city of 307,953 with such tourist attractions as an aquarium, a decommissioned aircraft carrier, and the Mirador de la Flor, a monument to the Tejano pop singer Selena whose inscription reads, in part, *HER PERSONA ENRICHED THE LIVES OF THOSE SHE*

Michael Brick is the author of Saving the School, published last August by the Penguin Press. He lives in Austin, Texas.



TOUCHED. There's also a minor-league ballpark, where one night two summers ago I saw a white man taunt a largely Mexican crowd to the edge of violence.

I arrived at Whataburger Field in the high heat of an early-September afternoon and was met at the gate by a man named Steven Ship. Ship is a ponytailed music-industry veteran turned TV producer turned fight promoter who has

spent years trying to bring big-time Mexican wrestling—*lucha libre*—to the United States. He'd called a few weeks earlier to say that he'd landed a slot on two MTV channels and that there was a new fighter he wanted me to see.

"My name is RJ Brewer, and I'm from the greatest city in the United States: Phoenix, Arizona," the fighter said in a video that Ship sent me.

I never had to scale a fence to get what I wanted. I cut lawns because I wanted to, not because I had to. See, my mother is a very, very powerful woman, probably the most powerful woman in the United States of America. And she taught me at an early age that if I see something wrong, make it right.

That's exactly what she's doing in Phoenix, Arizona, and that's exactly what I'm going to do here.

Ship's fighter was the make-believe son of Arizona governor Jan Brewer, famous for both her aggressive anti-immigration policies and her finger-wagging confrontation with President Obama beside Air Force One on a Phoenix tarmac. In 2010, Brewer signed

into law Arizona Senate Bill 1070, which allows state authorities to direct police to check the immigration status of persons detained in stops. While opponents call it an invitation to racial profiling, the law survived a U.S. Supreme Court challenge with its central provision intact and has inspired similar legislation throughout the country. Attaching his fighter to Brewer and her law was a canny move on Ship's part, meant to get the maximum possible rise out of his audience, which is at least 80 percent Mexican-American.

Putting over a pro-wrestling persona is not easy. The task requires a thorough mastery of "kayfabe," a canny-derived term for the extreme strain of method acting peculiar to the sport. American pro wrestlers treat kayfabe with a devotion that requires denying the obvious. It's a head game. When you know you're faking and the audience knows you're faking and you know the audience knows you know you're faking because the fact that *pro wrestling is fake* has been documented, verified, and repeated to the point of cliché, and yet you stay in character on the walk from the locker room to your Mazda just in case someone is pointing his phone's camera at you from a window above the alley—that's kayfabe.

Luchadores elevate kayfabe to the realm of the soul. They wear artful costumes designed to telegraph their allegiances, though their audiences fully expect those allegiances to shift, prove false, and suffer betrayals for reasons that may never be explained.

Ship led me to the locker room. We were accompanied by the stage manager, who was predicting a riot. "My job," he said, "is to get him out of the building alive tonight." Then I stood before him: the bad man of *lucha libre*, dressed in cargo shorts, a muscle shirt, and sneakers, sitting on



a weight bench owned by a Double-A affiliate of the Houston Astros. He had a seven-dollar haircut and an attentive gaze.

"I see the kids screaming at me, I see the middle fingers, and I say to myself, They don't belong here. They don't have the right to be screaming at me. They're probably not even here legally," he said. "I don't try to be the RJ Brewer character; at that point I *am*. It's like selling cars or being a waiter or bartender at a restaurant. You're on-stage. You're just selling a different product. I'm selling my views. I'm selling hate."

During the interview, "RJ" did something I wasn't expecting: he indicated my notebook, looked me in the eye, and disavowed some of his character's more extreme beliefs. This presented a major breach of kayfabe, one so startlingly flagrant as to seem calculated. In fact, admitting the obvious point that he wasn't actually related to Brewer while insisting "My

message is real" may simply have added another level to the performance. While we were at it, he confirmed that his real name was John Stagikas, that he was thirty-one, and that he was from Framingham, Massachusetts. He'd played wide receiver for Assumption College in Worcester until surgery to remove a cyst in his throat derailed him in his junior year. In 2000, having lost what he called "the football bug," he'd enrolled in wrestling classes under the tutelage of the famous Killer Kowalski.

"Make the people notice you," Kowalski advised him.

At this Stagikas had failed consistently. He chose the hopelessly earnest stage name "Hurricane" John Walters, finishing off opponents with a combination backbreaker rack and face-down slam he called the Hurricane DDT. Barrel-chested and athletic, he carried on as though endowed

with some innate righteousness for which he deserved to win. His all-American-golden-boy posture was easy to lampoon. He was playing the traditional "face," a role out of fashion since the prime of Hulk Hogan, whom the Hurricane by comparison made seem a subtle master of character development. In the early aughts, a period known to wrestling's followers as the Attitude Era, Stagikas/Walters was a man out of time. For most of the next decade, he shuttled between circuits of varying repute. In the process, he learned that technical proficiency is a surprisingly small part of the business. What he was doing was less *pro wrestling* than just very good wrestling. Nobody wanted to see that.

His career might have ended right there—with lightning-striped tights in the back of his closet and a set of Google results to explain to potential employers—except that Steve Ship came around looking for a new white star to round out an impres-

sive cast of *técnicos* (*lucha libre*'s equivalent of the American "face"), *rudos* (antagonists, who in America are called "heels"), *minis* (self-explanatory), and cross-dressing performers known as *exóticos*.

In John Stagikas, Ship saw his ideal RJ Brewer. He didn't need to tinker much with his Walters persona; he just needed to give it a different context. Ship planned to turn all of Stagikas's failings into strengths, transforming him from unimaginative face into clown prince of the *rudos*, and to build a North American franchise—English-language crossover matches, action figures, video games—around his gringo buffoonery.

Steve Ship is not the first promoter to put a nationalistic provocateur in the ring. His inspiration derives from the wrestlers billed as Nikolai Volkoff of the Soviet Union and the Iron Sheik of Iran, who enjoyed long careers during wrestling's Reagan-era heyday. Making the same concept work in *lucha libre* has been a matter of escalating the rhetoric, finding the right performer, and understanding who the real heel is. Several years ago, at Arco Arena in Sacramento, Ship introduced me to a twenty-six-year-old by the name of Jack Evans, a compact, rheumy-eyed chain-smoker with a permanent hangover and a fade haircut. Cast as a leader of the Foreign Legion, a horde of non-Mexican wrestlers, Evans would pester the crowd with racial meanness until the native *luchador* Super Fly and his partner, Crazy Boy, who wore a red basketball jersey that said MEXICAN POWER, came out to crush him. This was all back before Governor Brewer signed SB 1070, so Jack Evans was just supposed to be a typical American jerk.

I'd been hanging around backstage on the 2009

Invasion Tour, an American offshoot of the Mexican Asistencia Asesoría y Administración league, for a newspaper series on outsider sports, the kind that tend to be televised only on channels entirely devoted to televising them. For several years, the AAA had been falling behind its chief rival in Mexico, the Consejo Mundial de Lucha Libre, and hoped to make up ground north of the border. A *luchador* called Abismo Negro, who was supposed to join us on Ship's Invasion Tour, had just died of a heart attack. But some pretty big stars—La Parka and El Mesías in particular—plus the usual cast of *minis* and *exóticos* did come on board.

Back in the locker room, I watched a Canadian veteran named Vampiro ice his neck while a *luchador* called Konnan sat on the rubdown table. There was a buffet spread with *queso blanco*, pickled jalapeños, and mango juice.

"I swear to God, when I hit that railing, I thought I broke my fucking

leg," Vampiro said. "And then when you hit me in the back of the neck..."

"My bad," Konnan said. "It won't happen again."

Vampiro gave that some consideration. The *luchadores* were in their forties, and they had been hitting and kicking and body-slammings one another for many years. No matter what Konnan said, it would almost certainly happen again.

"For a couple guys who are already broken-down," Vampiro said, "we can really light it up."

Konnan agreed that they could really light it up. Their fight had drawn nearly 6,000 spectators, despite Vampiro's less-than-wholehearted commitment to the entire undertaking. In a sport defined by elaborate masquerade, he left the locker room in sweats. Yet the crowd received him rapturously. As his business with Konnan wrapped up, I asked Vampiro how he'd gotten his start. He told me about growing up in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Born Ian Hodgkinson, he'd abandoned junior-league hockey for rock music and drugged his way through the L.A. goth scene of the late 1980s, compiling a résumé loaded with such superbly unverifiable gigs as Milli Vanilli bodyguard. By the early 1990s, still dressed in thick makeup, cowboy boots, and sprayed-out purple hair, he had turned up in Mexico City. Calling himself El Vampiro Canadiense, he painted his face whiter than its natural pallor. He draped long, dark braids over his eyes. With goth intensity, he entered the ring to Guns N' Roses's "Welcome to the Jungle." Cast against the traditional acrobatics and sexual slapstick of the sport, he was a glam-rock apostle of the north, a dark, brooding, and vagabond antihero.

His timing was magnificent. In a decade when NAFTA remade the continental economy, when the number of



Turning Toward Home

REFLECTIONS ON THE FAMILY FROM HARPER'S MAGAZINE

Some of our most loving—and most difficult—relationships are with our parents, children, siblings, and extended families. These complicated relationships are the foundation of our society and our lives: they define our past, give us hope for the future, teach us to get along with others, and, often, provide excellent examples of how not to behave. The moving essays in *Turning Toward Home*, all of which were originally published in *Harper's Magazine*, gracefully explore these dynamics. Authors include David Mamet, Donna Tartt, Richard Ford, Sallie Tisdale, Louise Erdrich, and many more. Introduction by Verlyn Klinkenborg.

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Mexicans living in the United States increased by 50 percent, to 20 million, and annual remittances nearly doubled, to \$7 billion, Hodgkinson became a star of films (*Vampiro: Guerrero de la Noche*), a subject of corridos, and an object of lust. There were dolls and lunch boxes, posters and calendars. An advice column appeared under his name. *Circo* magazine named him one of the fifty most beautiful people in Latin America. Along the way, he traded Guns N' Roses for AC/DC's "Back in Black." His renown expanded no matter the inconsistency of his stage name: The Canadian Vampire Casanova, Vampiro Casanova, El Vampiro, or simply Vampiro. (When asked about these changes, Hodgkinson said, "I didn't speak fucking Spanish.") In *lucha libre*, as in politics, popular success flows from the astute selection of enemies, and Hodgkinson found an able foil in Charles Ashenoff, the bulky Cuban who wrestled as Konnan. Fueled by a fight over Vampiro's signature hairstyle, the two men began a feud they nurtured across decades.

"Vampiro, what can I say?" Konnan told *Pro Wrestling Torch* in 1994.

He came into Mexico and he was a real big, big, big star. His popularity has dipped because a lot of times for press conferences he hasn't shown up, a lot of times he was gonna give away tickets at the Arena Mexico and he never showed up. Then he said he was going to quit wrestling because he had epilepsy and asthma, but yet he was going to start a rock band. I would publicly put in newspapers that it takes the same energy to play a guitar and jump up and down on stage as it does wrestling, so he can't have epilepsy or asthma. Then when his rock and roll career died, he came back into wrestling.

Though intended as trash talk, Konnan's account was fairly accurate: Hodgkinson had briefly quit wrestling to front a punk band, just because that was his thing. In light of his marginal grappling skills, manifest distractibility, and apparent disdain for the wrestling business, promoters started casting him as a *rudo*. But to fans on both sides of the bor-

der he remained a singularly enduring *técnico*. In 2005, he accepted a commission to lead a Mexico City chapter of the Guardian Angels vigilante group. Decades past his prime, Hodgkinson was doing this tour to "get the fuck out of Mexico City," he said, "and to shop." He was a hard man to know.

The morning after the Sacramento fight, he took a seat behind the bus driver, stretched out his bum leg, and began eating his breakfast of beef jerky and Milk Duds. The production coordinator was taking attendance—"Super Fly *está*, Laredo *está*"—and the driver was taking votes for the day's lunch stop. Mall food court beat out IHOP by a wide margin. As the bus rolled down I-80, the *luchadores* watched *Kung Fu Panda*.

At the Westfield mall in San Jose, the *luchadores* passed up a make-your-own-salad place and Hot Dog on a Stick, opting instead for Mongolian barbecue; then they did some shopping. They returned to the bus with tubs of protein powder from GNC and pink bags from Victoria's Secret. We all sat outside the bus and watched Jack Evans smoke some cigarettes and listened to him talk about the relative merits of the strip clubs in Mexico City versus here until the promoters called *vámonos*. We drove on to the Sheraton, then the arena.

When the lights dimmed that night, Jack Evans, Silver King, and the rest of the Foreign Legion got the crowd worked up. The heroic *técnicos* took their scripted beating. Then a hush fell. And just when all seemed lost, that familiar crunch of electric guitar erupted from the speakers, that bear hug of a bass line, that nails-to-chalkboard screech:

Back in black
I hit the sack
I been too long, I'm glad to be back

And here was Vampiro in black jeans, black armbands, and a black sleeveless shirt, a dark and ageless blur lurching down the runway, diving headfirst into the ring, and pummeling each opponent harder than the last. In due time, he turned his wrath on Silver King, the villainous traitor of Coahuila.

As the crowd urged him on, Vampiro lumbered around the ring, moved into the stands, then stopped to rest, his hands on his knees, at which point Silver King smashed him with a chair. The referee got in some blows, too. The assault went on and on, but never did the crowd lose faith. A chant went up: "Vam-pee-RO! Vam-pee-RO!"

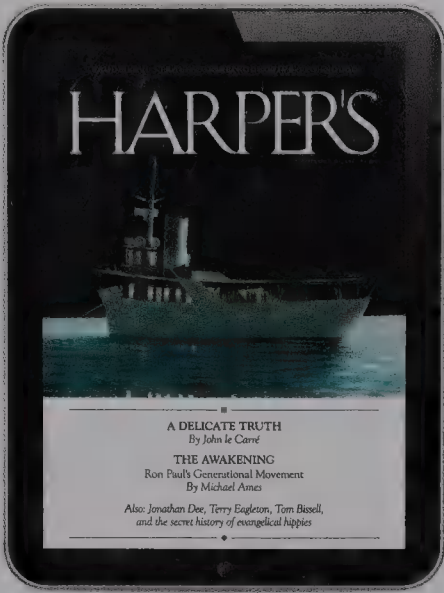
Finally the great champion summoned the strength to flip Silver King onto the cement. He gave the crowd a slow burn. Bending to one knee, he reached down for the discarded chair as if it were the Sword in the Stone.

Soon enough Silver King would be vanquished, the damnable referee would get his, and the unmoored Canadian who fought for the Mexican cause would take his victory lap through a crowd clamoring with cries of "Te quiero mucho" to touch his dark and ragged garments. But as he raised the chair above his head in agonizing slow motion, taking up the weapon of desperados in the name of righteousness, Vampiro looked stricken, torn, hurt on some cosmic level, as if the whole continent were turning faithless and cruel and there was no way to tell what anybody might do next.

In preparation for my trip to Corpus Christi, I looked into how things had turned out for Vampiro. Under his real name, he was still listed as the leader of the Mexico City Guardian Angels. I also found a dispatch from the U.K. *Sun* that told how he'd slept through a burglary at his Guadalajara apartment, panicked at the sight of responding police officers, and leaped from his fourth-story bedroom window, breaking his back. When I contacted him to verify that account, he denied it, adding, "I don't have any interest at all in wrestling. I am out of touch and I just don't want to know about it anymore."

In Vampiro's absence, Ship had assembled a new cast with crossover appeal in mind. Some of his masked *técnicos* billed their hometowns as Mexican cities—Guadalajara, Chihuahua, Torreón—but others claimed San Juan and even Atlanta.

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HARPER'S
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SOLUTION TO THE APRIL PUZZLE

Puzzle editing by Dan Asimov.
Note: * indicates an anagram.

The eight unclued entries are alternate names for the Devil. The nine circled letters spell NICK-NAMES.

S	M	B	E	E	L	Z	E	B	U	B	P	R
T	E	R	M	S	T	O	N	E	W	A	R	E
R	P	A	I	T	E	N	O	L	A	R	I	L
A	H	I	T	H	E	E	V	I	L	O	N	E
B	I	L	K	E	R	S	I	A	T	N	C	A
I	S	L	E	T	O	P	T	L	U	G	E	R
S	T	E	R	I	L	I	Z	A	T	I	O	N
M	O	N	O	C	L	E	S	M	U	R	F	S
U	P	G	V	S	S	S	D	U	B	O	D	Y
S	H	O	E	L	A	C	E	S	A	T	A	N
C	E	L	R	U	A	L	B	I	C	O	R	E
O	L	D	S	C	R	A	T	C	H	T	K	R
G	E	S	T	I	C	U	L	A	T	I	N	G
I	S	E	A	F	O	G	A	L	I	L	E	I
T	H	E	T	E	M	P	T	E	R	L	S	S
O	R	D	E	R	E	D	H	S	E	I	S	M

N I C K N A M E S

- ACROSS: 11. two mngs.; 12. hidden; 13. rev.; 15. A(p)ril; 16. a-hi; 18. bi(l)kers; 21. *; 22. *; 24. two mngs.; 25. *; 26. monoc(l[He]l[en])e*; 28. SMU-r(ight)-f(rom)-s(tart); 35. bo(d)y; 36. *; 39. hidden; 40. albi*-core; 42. gesti(Cu)lating*; 47. Galile(e)-I; 49. two mngs.; 50. s-ms-i.e.(rev.).
- DOWN: 1. *; 3. Bra-ill-e(nvy); 4. rev.; 5. *; 6. (Cal)zones; 8. bar-on; 10. rel.-earn; 14. O(V-it)z; 19. two mngs.; 20. homophone; 23. pi(n)es; 27. O-vers(tat)e; 29. *; 30. ro(rev.)-to-till; 31. *; 32. g(enerated)-old; 33. S.A.-a-r; 34. deb-t(estosterone); 39. co-GL-to; 43. pun; 44. even letters; 45. hidden; 46. two mngs.

(Promotional materials noted that Marco Corleone, a spiky-haired gringo, had paid his dues in Mexico, “dominating the ring and capturing his audience with the highest vertical leap in the business.”)

About an hour before showtime, I stood under a giant statue of a home-run slugger, watching hundreds of Latino families pass through the gates of Whataburger Field. There were thumb-wrestling puppets and face painters for the kids. Vendors hawked *máscaras*. Ring girls posed in flag bikinis—both Mexican and American. A man dressed up as a taco distributed T-shirts via slingshot.

I wandered down under the bleachers to watch the *luchadores* make their preparations and to find the promotion’s lead writer, Alex Abrahantes. He’d wrestled on the American circuit as Too Phat Yutzak Arafat, Keeper of the Harem, after a trainer told him, “You look dark. I’m going to make you an Arab.” Abrahantes’s path from there to inventing characters like RJ Brewer wasn’t tough to imagine. I asked what kind of wrestler it would take to bring the act to life.

“When you walk into the crowd,” Abrahantes said, “you have this energy where you evoke emotion from them and you draw energy from them.” He explained that Stagikas “has done a great job of portraying the character and making it his own. He’ll add things to the character. He has a really good mind for psychology, which is a big part of this industry.”

As Abrahantes spoke, I considered the suggestion that a few script changes might elevate John Stagikas/Hurricane Walters/RJ Brewer from a strained Captain America act into a credibly venomous xenophobe, just like that. Americans had loved booing Nikolai Volkoff and the Iron Sheik, but they seemed genuinely to despise Rowdy Roddy Piper, a Canadian who portrayed a Scotsman. Maybe there’s just some ineffable quality, a kind of metakayfabe, that allows performers comfortable beyond a certain level of cognitive dissonance to cast a spell over their audience.

Across the locker room, Stagikas stood alone, shirtless; s.b. 1070 was emblazoned on the backside of his tights. I followed him out to the hall, where he rested his forehead against a fence near some disused pretzel machines. Deep in thought, perhaps, becoming RJ Brewer. He paced a tight circle, cracked his neck, and peeked out at the crowd. On the loudspeakers, an announcer asked whether Corpus Christi was ready. Brewer prepared to “cut a promo,” provoking the crowd before returning to the locker room while the undercard is fought.

“One on each side, guys, let’s go,” the stage manager said. Uniformed police officers moved into position, flanking Brewer, who walked out across the turf with the swagger of a beach bully. “Meh-hee-CO! Meh-hee-CO!” people chanted. Then Brewer took the microphone.

“Finally I get to wrestle in a baseball park,” he announced, “which means plenty of fresh air, which means I don’t have to smell you people.”

When he’d finished his introductory speech, he walked back toward third base and down into the dugout. He stood at the gateway to the tunnel leading back to the locker room, artificial fog obscuring his face. His police escorts started to giggle. Before he could slip completely out of view, he was confronted by a boy of perhaps six, who ran down the aisle and declared, in English: “Hey! I don’t like you.”

“I don’t like you either, you little twerp,” Brewer said. “Get out of my face.”

Down the hall, the stage manager kept up the aggro patter—“My job isn’t complete,” he told Brewer, “until you get shanked in an alley somewhere”—though the crowd outside seemed more inclined to cheer for airborne *camisetas* than to shank anybody. When the *minis* and *exóticos* performed, rollicking laughter sounded in the night air, and when Mini Park led a dance-off, children selected from the audience won by acclamation.

Back in the locker room, Stagikas practiced a few moves with the *luchador* who was to vanquish him in the final act, Blue Demon Jr., then attempted small talk.

“How about just over the border, the Mexico–U.S. border? Is it hot there?” Stagikas inquired.

Blue Demon Jr. affirmed that climatological assessment. Stagikas walked the hall, presumably getting back into character. He did some push-ups, listened for his cue, then entered the ring as RJ Brewer.

The *luchadores* set to each other. A smack in the mouth, a rub of the jaw, and the crowd was chanting again, louder and sharper, “Meh-hee-CO! Meh-hee-CO!” Brewer complained to the ref, faked quitting the match, and then threw a sucker punch. By the time Brewer hoisted Blue Demon Jr. to the turnbuckle, unlaced his opponent’s mask, and started to pry it off, grown men were leaning forward in their seats: for a *luchador*, no humiliation can surpass an unmasking.

Just as rehearsed, Blue Demon Jr. caught Brewer in the ribs. The violence went on and on, a trading of body slams and clotheslinings, great exclamations, groans and squeals, near-pin after near-pin until at last the figure of RJ Brewer lay prone on the mat, under the able grasp of the adopted son of Blue Demon, champion of Nuevo Leon. The people seemed pleased as they went off to buy more T-shirts and masks. Of course, they couldn’t do much about the power people like Jan Brewer have in their adopted homeland, but that night they’d watched her putative son stumble away, holding his head in both hands, defeated, shamed, and perhaps something more.

Stagikas could not have known it then, but the next few years would bring stardom. He had managed to make himself noticed. The crowds would grow. The production would elevate him to the leadership of a *rudo* gang called the Right. In January, he appeared in character on *Nightline*, telling an interviewer, “this is really how I feel.” Currently, Brewer and his gang are on a nine-city tour making stops in Houston, San Jose, Los Angeles, and, yes, Phoenix. So far as anyone knows, the American face Hurricane Walters has been permanently retired. ■

DRAWN BY THE SUN

Photographs by Katy Grannan



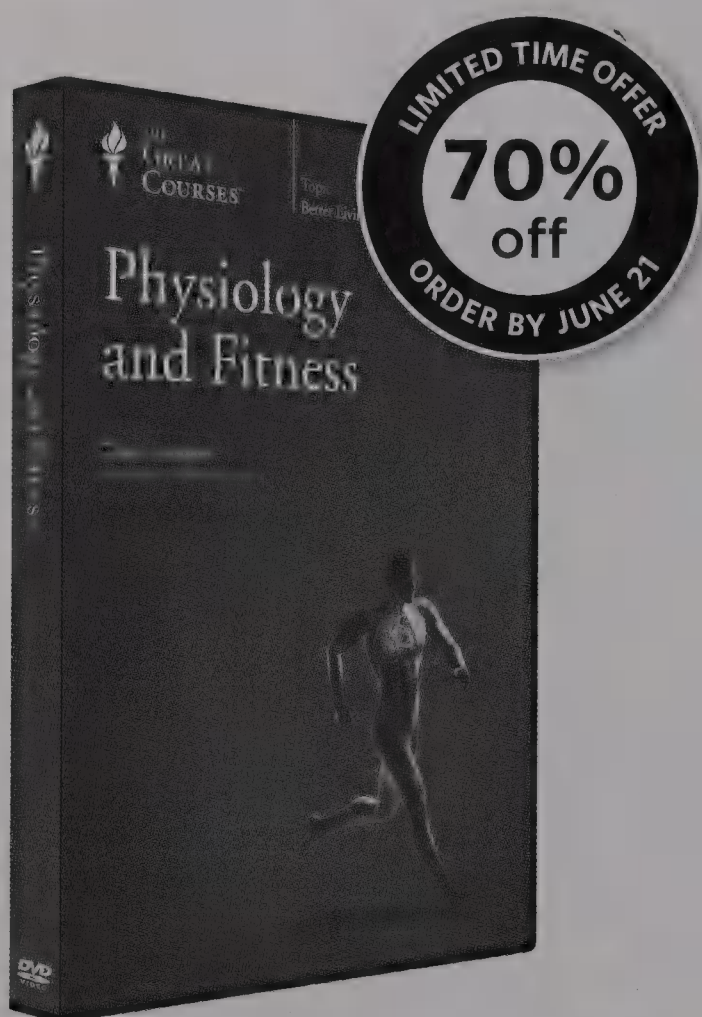
Katy Grannan has been making photographs throughout California since 2008. She says of her subjects, "They are the invisible ones, marginalized by both geographic and psychological isolation." Grannan's work will be on view this month at Frieze New York.







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AN UNCOMMON PAIN

Living with the mystery of headache

By Sallie Tisdale

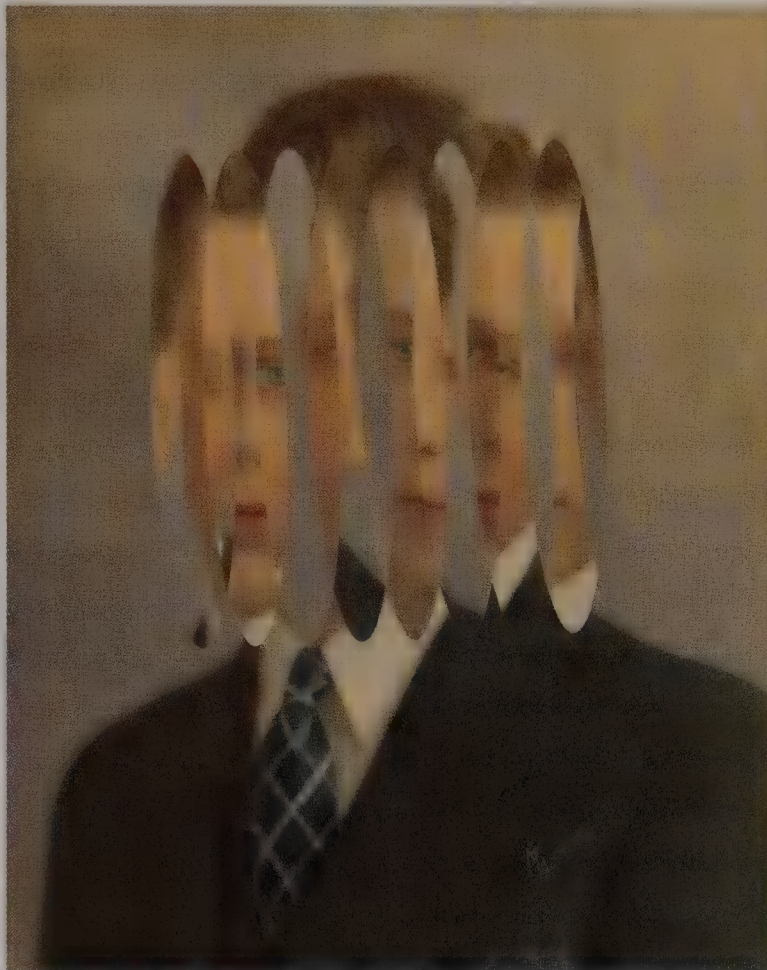
"I'm very brave generally," he went on in a low voice: "only today I happen to have a headache."

—Tweedledum

My headache began on a Monday afternoon around three o'clock. The pain centered on my left temple and eye, constant, gnawing, broken only by sudden waves of sharper pain. My doctor was on vacation, but after several days I decided I couldn't wait and took the next available appointment. By the time I made it to her office I could hardly walk across the room in a straight line.

The physician's assistant was attentive, working down the neurological checklist: reflexes, balance, gait, grip strength, and cranial-nerve function, which affects swallowing, eye movement, sensation, facial expression, and more. Everything was normal, except for the pain. Finally, with a grunt of

Sallie Tisdale's last article for Harper's Magazine, "The One in Front of You," appeared in the July 2012 issue.



satisfaction, she decided that I must be dehydrated. I knew that I was dehydrated because I couldn't eat, and that I couldn't eat because I had a headache that would not stop. By then the headache had so eroded my ability to think that I didn't even comment; I just waited in a darkened room while she wrote a prescription for Vicodin.

When my doctor returned a week later, she was also attentive, and took her time: reflexes, balance, gait, grip

strength, cranial-nerve function. The Vicodin had given me no relief. I was tremulous, ill defined. The feeling was hard to describe; my words failed, trailing off.

"I'm sure it's not migraine," she told me. Migraines rarely last more than a few days. "But I'm not sure what it is." Although severe headaches are only rarely a sign of something dire, like a ruptured aneurysm or a brain tumor, she recommended an MRI to be sure.

"There is a medication that sometimes works for headaches like these," she said, and suggested I try indomethacin, an anti-inflammatory drug in the

same class as ibuprofen. Usually reserved for arthritis, it's a nasty medication, known for causing stomach ulcers and gastrointestinal bleeding, cardiac arrhythmia and heart failure. I started taking twenty-five milligrams twice a day—started as soon as the pharmacist handed me the bottle—along with a daily dose of omeprazole, an acid-reducing drug, to protect my gut. The pain retreated but didn't disappear. I complained in private but mostly I

kept my headache to myself, shivering my way through conversations. I had work and a class to teach and my son was getting married in a month.

Headaches are nothing special. They grant one only brief and local respite. That this one endured, that it buffeted my every step, was hard to explain. I wasn't sure anyone would believe me; after all, I hadn't really believed in such a thing, either. Another person's pain, writes Elaine Scarry, is "vaguely alarming yet unreal," and the inability to truly sympathize with another's suffering is a sign of "pain's triumph." She adds, "Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability."

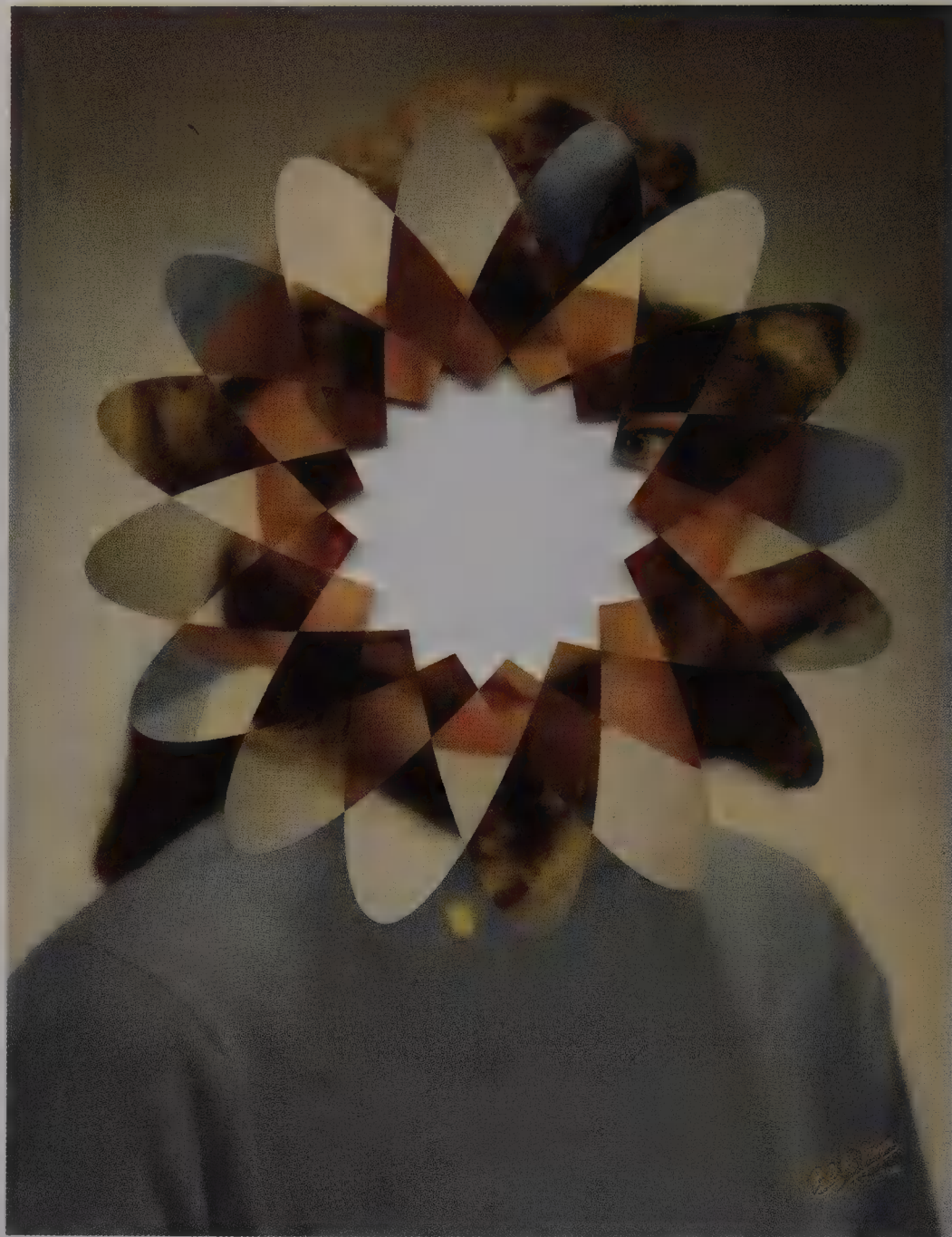
The MRI rooms were spacious and cool. I exchanged my shirt for a cotton gown that smelled of sunshine. A young woman called my name, introduced me to a bearded man seated in front of a set of screens, and led me to the machine. She deftly inserted an IV needle into my arm and slid me in. Many people feel claustrophobic in the sleek white tube of the MRI machine; I was relieved simply to lie down and be left alone for a while. The rhythmic clangs, knocks, and thuds of the magnets were not unlike the ambient music I enjoy; the clatter was soothing, and I dozed.

After a time, the frame slid out and she injected the contrast.

"If there is any pathology, this will light it up," she said, and slid me back inside.

My doctor called a few days later. The MRI was clean. No tumor, no bleeding, no stroke. Over the next few weeks, I saw a dentist, a chiropractor, a massage therapist, and a nutritionist. No one had an answer. I got confused if I tried to do more than one thing at a time, even when the pain had receded. I would sometimes find myself hunched in a chair, covering my left eye with my hand, doing nothing. I began to feel like an invalid. I was not "having headaches." I had a headache, one single unrelenting headache, drowning everything else out.

Since the earliest days of medicine, the headache has been described with respect and even awe. People have



long marveled at the catholic sweep and wretched nature of its suffering, at its ability to drive victims almost mad. Headaches seem to make people see the world differently: Lewis Carroll, Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, and Georges Seurat are all said to have had them. They are a leading reason people take sick days and a common cause of visits to the emergency room. Determining the kind of headache a patient has is one of the trickier problems facing primary-care physicians. In the sometimes tautological language of medicine, headaches are both cause and effect, symptom and disorder. Descriptions are looping, self-referential. The International Headache Society created a detailed diagnostic system in 1988, but

it is the subject of ongoing debate. A fair amount of the space devoted to headaches in medical and scientific journals is given over to the reorganization of categories and nomenclature. When you're in the throes of a headache, finding your place in the subsections of diagnosis is like hiking through a junkyard.

Almost all headaches are primary, meaning they aren't caused by anything else—but it is variously the muscles, blood vessels, skin, bone, mucous membranes, and nerves that hurt. That headaches can be felt in so many ways means treatment is inevitably a little experimental. Like most pains, headaches sometimes respond to placebos. They are often treated with medications prescribed "off

label”—that is, in ways the FDA has not recommended for use. There are first-line drugs and second-line drugs and why-not-give-this-one-a-try drugs, and people usually use several before finding one, or a combination, that helps: antidepressants, beta-blockers, steroids, calcium-channel blockers, anticonvulsants, antihistamines, Botox, and lidocaine are all used, along with ergot (from which LSD was first synthesized) and narcotics. (And almost all these drugs can cause headaches.) But people also prescribe for themselves: butterbur, feverfew, vitamin B2, magnesium, melatonin, kudzu, vinegar, St. John's wort, coenzyme Q10, biofeedback therapy, special diets, acupuncture, and marijuana. Everything works sometimes, for someone, somewhere, and no one can easily explain why.

The majority of headaches are “tension type.” They often start in the morning, just as a person is waking up. The head feels squeezed as in a vise. (How many of us have had our heads put in a vise? And yet that is the image people invariably choose.) Duller pain travels down the temples and into the neck and shoulders. Despite the name, tension-type headaches are not the result of muscle tension; indeed, there is no consistent abnormality in the muscles of the head and neck during a headache, and the pain may be the result of increased sensitization in the central nervous system. When people say, “It’s just a headache,” they mean that it will go away in time—but how odd that a person in good health can be brought to his knees by a puzzling, harmless occurrence of unknown cause. It is a headache—but no headache is just a headache.

Headache is a peculiar insult, an intrusion into the mind; it is inherently emotional. The pain makes it hard to think and destroys equanimity, but so does the accompanying neuronal storm. Headaches trigger a response in the emotional centers of the brain; your head is making you lose your temper, making you cry. I’m not trying to claim that the pain from a headache is worse than the pain of a broken bone or the gnaw of tumor and infection—though certain types of headache cause pro-

found pain—but there is something fundamentally different about it, a pain benign in a technical sense, malignant in an existential one. The sufferer is oddly contracted and reduced. The word is almost unbearably banal for the metaphysical jolt and psychic crisis engendered; what we call a headache is a neurological event encompassing every part of a person: body, mind, feeling, and that ephemeral construct we call *self*.

The indomethacin tamped down my constant pain, but every hour or so I had sudden tides of sharp pain that I began to call surges. They were always on the left side of my head above the eye and in the temple, with swells of tingling and electrical sensations. They made my eye squint and blink; sometimes my jaw ached, or I found myself leaning to the left in my chair.

Indomethacin is singularly diagnostic for an uncommon headache I had never heard of called hemicrania continua. Indomethacin reduces intracranial pressure, but how this relates to the pain of hemicrania is unclear. Other drugs in the same class don’t help; opiates don’t help, and neither do the triptans, drugs that reduce the constriction of blood vessels in the brain and help treat migraine. (No other severe headache is relieved by indomethacin alone.) So, ipso facto, hemicrania is a headache that responds to indomethacin—“responds absolutely” is the classic description; an “exquisite response” is another.

I work part-time as a nurse, and that means I’m the kind of patient politely called proactive; I was in research mode as soon as I left the office. Even with my brain off center, I spent hours in the medical library reading about what my physician called “headaches like these.” The description I found—of a one-sided headache that sets in suddenly, with no apparent trigger, and doesn’t go away—sounded right, though only the drug would tell. “The appropriate dose will vary,” I read, scribbling notes, my head cradled in my hand. One should take whatever amount of indomethacin “results in resolution

of headache.” With a little trepidation, my doctor agreed to let me double my dose.

Medical diagnosis is a lot less precise than people sometimes think. Illness is just description. Things we can measure are called “signs”; things the patient feels are called “symptoms”; this more or less coherent collection of details leads to a diagnosis that may be reached by trial and error. Research on the pathophysiology of headache runs to thousands of pages a year, with few answers. Are headaches generated by the peripheral or the central nervous system? How are headaches related to the immune system? “Individuals presenting with CDH,” I read in an overview of the research, are considered “among the most difficult cases” a neurologist will treat.

Chronic daily headache (CDH)—a grouping of disorders rather than a diagnosis—is a term used to describe all headaches that occur at least fifteen days each month, including the specific conditions of chronic migraine, hemicrania continua, and new daily persistent headache (NDPH). People who develop chronic headaches are at risk of having them for the rest of their lives. They may, I read, lapse from medical care, seeking high doses of narcotics or such alternative remedies as electromagnetic bracelets and colon cleansing. Others may become increasingly desperate, opting for nerve blocks—injections of steroids near major nerves. (One new treatment involves implanting electrodes in the brain via the back of the neck and connecting them to a battery implanted elsewhere in the body.) Some are unable to work again, and a few kill themselves.

NDPH is a headache that develops suddenly and never goes away; this unremitting quality is the primary symptom. One of the characteristics of NDPH is that people can pinpoint when the headache started: “patients can recall exactly what they were doing and when at the time of onset.” Many people with daily headaches wait weeks or even months to see a doctor. Perhaps they are afraid of what the headaches mean, or perhaps they fear that no one will be able to offer relief.

Usually the sufferer has no history of headache, but up to 30 percent of people with NDPH have a recent history of flulike illness or an upper-respiratory infection; a statistically significant number test positive for the Epstein-Barr virus. Various biochemical markers are abnormal in sufferers of chronic headaches, though knowing that you have a glutamate-receptor disturbance, decreased blood-platelet serotonin levels, increased levels of nerve growth factor and substance P, or overactivation of the contralateral posterior hypothalamus and ipsilateral rostral pons isn't much more help than being told you have a new daily persistent headache. One theory posits a temporary malfunction of the pain-control pathway. Does this mean our normal neurological environment includes pain hidden from conscious perception—that our brains have simply evolved to protect themselves from the pain of being alive?

A few weeks after the pain began, having missed work and canceled appointments and plans, I started telling more people about the headache. Immediately the advice came. Eliminate gluten. Eliminate corn. Eliminate soy, dairy, nuts. My boss told me to take a triptan. The massage therapist digging into the knot in my neck told me I needed craniofacial manipulation. A dermatologist recommended Botox. "It *might* work," she said, "and anyway, you'd get a nice wrinkle treatment for a few months."

"Your doctor is wrong," a woman said confidently. "It's a migraine. I *know*. I have migraines."

Migraine is the second most common type of headache, though headache is only one symptom of what is sometimes called a disease and other times a disorder, a condition, a syndrome. (One specialist prefers to call migraine "a genetically unique nervous-system configuration.") People with migraines are typically called "migraineurs," as though it were a profession, or a tribe. (Not every person with migraine appreciates this conflation of patient and disease, though it seems to me that many treat migraine as a central part of their identity, like a kind of ethnicity.)

When people say they have a migraine, they usually mean a severe and peculiar kind of headache: throbbing, one-sided, accompanied by nausea and sometimes vomiting, by photophobia (oversensitivity to light) and sometimes phonophobia (oversensitivity to sound). But headache is not always the main experience of migraine, and may not be present at all. About 20 percent of attacks start with "auras," which range from the perception of vivid and "scintillating" lights to tingling or numbness along the skin, food cravings, trouble speaking or hearing, or depression. Some people yawn irresistibly. During a migraine attack, people can become so confused they appear intoxicated; afterward, they may experience a sense of euphoria. But there are also bilateral migraine headaches and migraine attacks without auras, nausea, or sensory or mood changes. Some migraine attacks, mostly in children, are felt primarily in the abdomen; another type causes temporary paralysis. Migraineurs may also experience Alice-in-Wonderland syndrome, in which parts of the body seem to be of abnormal size. My friend Jeanne went blind one day from a migraine; she couldn't see normally for four months.

The Migraine Disability Assessment Scale (MIDAS) determines how much time is lost to migraine from work, schooling, household chores, family time, social time, and recreation. Migraineurs have higher rates of stroke, allergies, epilepsy, and psychiatric illness than does the population at large, and also a higher incidence of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, phobias, and panic attacks; which comes first is unknown, but early childhood trauma is more common in people with migraine. People with acute migraines are protected by federal anti-discrimination law.

The aptly named "cortical spreading depression"—a slow electrical wave flowing across the brain—may be the cause of migraine's motley symptoms. The attacks may be triggered by certain types of food, nitrates, nitrites, sulfites, lack of sleep, dehydration, stress, light, altitude,

menstrual cycles, menopause, and changes in the weather. Fasting can trigger a migraine attack: thus the term "first-of-Ramadan headache." Triptans are the treatment of choice for most people with migraine attacks, and for whatever reason old-school antidepressants can also work. Migraineurs may take a preventive medication every day and use another as soon as the headache starts. (This is called abortion, or rescue.) Sleep helps, but so does vomiting. I met a woman recently who told me she had become used to disabling migraine attacks accompanied by vomiting and blurry vision. One day the aura began and she screamed, "Goddamn it, I will *not* have this headache!" And the headache stopped and she never had another migraine attack. "I do believe you can argue with your body," she told me. I am not sure you can argue with every headache.

There is yet another grouping called TAC, or trigeminal autonomic cephalalgias. (*Cephalalgia* is Latin for "headache.") TACs are distinguished by unilateral pain following the path of the trigeminal nerve, along the face and scalp. TACs have autonomic symptoms familiar to anyone with allergies: the eyes become red or swollen; tears flow freely; the face is red and hot. Because these are one-sided headaches, the autonomic symptoms are usually one-sided as well—one droopy eye, sweating on half of the face, a single runny nostril—almost always on the side with the pain. They can be remarkably disabling: one type, which may be triggered simply by lightly touching the cheek, can occur as many as 200 times a day, with each attack lasting a few seconds to several minutes. The attacks usually continue for life.

Cluster headache is included in the TAC group. Cluster describes very sharp pains on one side of the head; they come in attacks of up to eight per day, for weeks or months at a time. A cluster headache is limited in duration, but the pain is considered one of the most severe known. They have been called suicide headaches because the pain is so intense that the sufferer will sometimes bang her head against a wall or pull out



her hair, and because some people do attempt suicide.

Cluster is dramatic and uncommon. Like those of migraineurs, the brains of people with cluster headaches (who sometimes call themselves clusterheads) are microscopically different from other brains. What does it mean that a third of people with cluster headaches have brown eyes? I've found sober researchers describing people with cluster headaches as having a "leonine" appearance, as being taller than average, or as having thickened skin. A correct diagnosis, some estimates suggest, can take as long as nine years. Taking triptans and breathing high-flow oxygen are the most effective treatments for cluster headaches; hyperbaric pressure also helps. But there is growing evi-

dence that psilocybin, LSD, and related compounds can completely eliminate cluster headaches, even at subhallucinogenic doses.

And there are rarer headaches still: the thunderclap headache that can knock a person off a chair; stabbing headaches, sometimes called ice-pick headaches, in the eye or temple—the stabs last for just a few seconds but come in waves, many a minute in episodes lasting for days. There are headaches caused by taking too many pain-reducing medications; the brain insists on bouncing back. A nummular headache occurs in a discrete, coin-size spot. There are headaches triggered by cold or sunshine; alarm-clock headaches that wake people up from sleep like, well, clockwork; preorgasmic headaches

and orgasmic headaches and exertional headaches that make people ill when they exercise, and headaches you feel only when you cough.

None of these are my headache.

The pain of hemicrania continua centers around the eye and forehead. (A number of people with HC experience "foreign body" syndrome, the sense that there is something in the eye.) HC may seem to wax and wane, but it never disappears; in fact it is layered: the moderate, relentless foundation, a kind of water torture of headache, overlaid with bursts of sharp, even blinding, pain. Many people with hemicrania (and "many" is the wrong word; it is rarely diagnosed, though some researchers think it is less rare than once believed) also have "migrainous" symptoms, like my occasional nausea and sensitivity to light.

How quickly I was willing to take on the risks of indomethacin! I felt dizzy, clumsy, weak, but whether this was the medication or the headache is hard to say. The continual pain faded into the background, turning into a kind of internal pressure, as though the headache were pushing on the inside of my head, trying to get out. The surges diminished in frequency, and then in intensity, but didn't cease. Beneath the business of preparing for my son's wedding, a monotone of dull pain; on top of the happiness and cheer, the faint perfume of indomethacin. After a few weeks, I found myself sinking to the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: in danger. One night my heart began to skitter and twitch; I lay in bed and hoped they wouldn't take my medicine away.

I didn't tell my doctor about my heart, but still she refused to increase my dose, instead referring me to Dr. N., a neurologist with a weeks-long waiting list. Together they decided to start me right away on a low dose of gabapentin, an anti-convulsant. I was making the rounds that mark a long illness: telephone calls and paperwork, waiting on hold listening to pop songs and sitting in

waiting rooms and waiting to make a new appointment with a front-office clerk who never makes eye contact and asks for my “social” and then interrupts me to take a phone call, and I just wanted to be able to do *something*. I was acutely aware of being the patient, of having less power than the people to whom I was explaining myself. They were well and busy and I was only a small part of their day.

Dr. N.’s office is one in a long row of anonymous medical offices beside a small hospital in a town next to Portland, Oregon. He is Indian, a small and tidy man with a light accent. When I met him, about two months after my headache began, he was attentive, walking me through the exam: reflexes, balance, gait, grip strength, and cranial-nerve function. I had been on the gabapentin a month by then; my headache was muffled, but still unrelenting.

It’s not a migraine, he said dismissively. Nor is it cluster. And because I had not had an absolute—not an *exquisite*—response to indomethacin, he doubted that I had hemicrania continua. He pulled me into a dark room to show me the MRI on a computer, flipping rapidly through my brain; the lovely scalloped layers widened and thinned as we traveled through the slides. I would not have been surprised if the MRI had shown a tumor, or if my brain were lanced by the plaques of dementia. But mine was spotless, a smooth, dark-gray brain, a good-looking brain.

“See, it’s clear,” he said, as though we were discussing a spring sky. No clouds today. But then he pointed to a tiny spot, a small white curl of bone. “This could be it,” he said. “I think this is contact point.” I suspected that it wouldn’t be easy to get a smile out of this guy, but he smiled then. A solution. Seven years before, I’d had surgery on my sinuses, and I might now have a little bony overgrowth as a result. A contact-point headache is secondary, caused by a pinched nerve; pain is referred along the trigeminal nerve, and usually alleviated by surgery.

We talked about my odd jitteriness, how my body felt fragile and shaky, like a poorly built scaffold beginning to lean. Was this the head-

ache or the drugs? It was hard to tell—but he suggested that I increase my gabapentin dose quickly, that I really load up, and get off the indomethacin. This would be good for my heart. Gabapentin is a safer drug, but its side effects are varied: weakness, joint aches, depersonalization, somnolence, poor coordination, “strange feelings.”

Almost immediately, my heart settled down. But that week of weaning myself off the indomethacin gave me a headache that seemed to fill the world. When I woke each morning, I couldn’t think clearly. *What time is it?* I would wonder. *What’s going on?* Eventually I would rise, going straight for the morning dose, then dip my head under the faucet before climbing into the shower, pulling on clothes, and careering into the kitchen to line my stomach for the pills. Within an hour of each dose, I’d feel better. I’ve never needed medication in this acutely timed way before; it seemed the first sign of a fatal erosion. I resented the needing of it.

I had a CT scan and returned to Dr. F., who’d done my sinus surgery: a short, bald man with a head shaped like a ball. He perched casually on the exam table and told me that there was nothing to be seen on the CT—no bone spur, no contact point. The interventionist with tools for cutting bone didn’t want to intervene, and though invasive studies and surgery are generally way down on my list of things to do, I was disappointed to tears.

So I waited three weeks for the next appointment and went back to Dr. N., who was not smiling.

“I’ve reached my limit on headaches,” he told me. “I’m a general neurologist. If you had Parkinson’s disease? Multiple sclerosis, epilepsy—that’s what I do.”

Having reached the mountaintop of his exam table again, I was not willing to relinquish it so quickly. “Do you think it’s possible this really is a persistent headache?” I asked. NDPH: the headache that never goes away, never gets diagnosed beyond its own description, with few treatments.

He nodded. “Yes, perhaps.” Precise syllables, a cock of the head.

“What about going on an elimination diet?” I asked.

He shrugged a very small, tidy shrug. “It can’t hurt,” he said.

In order to see a headache specialist, I had to get authorization from my insurance provider to go out of network. I have good insurance, but I was into this for thousands of dollars by then. As the bills began to arrive, I could see why people delayed treatment, or gave up. More time on the phone, more voicemails, explaining myself to the point of crying, head in hand, letters, more calls, more waiting. How do people who don’t know how to work the system navigate it? How do people *with headaches* navigate it?

I had reached a point of feeling almost infinitely strange. I still had a headache all the time, though it was masked; I was depersonalized. Something almost like an aura ebbed and flowed away—the feeling of a crucial piece broken wild and loose, the cotter pin of control. After a particularly bad day, when my skin felt like fuzzy wool and I was afraid to drive and I couldn’t get an appointment with anyone, I cut back on my medication; I had plenty now, and I had reached the point of prescribing for myself. Soon my thinking cleared up, but the surges renewed—pain, and a frisson of electricity around the eye, into the cheek, a vague tingle. I found myself getting used to it.

Dr. P.’s headache clinic was just off a busy freeway exit at the junction of two overgrown suburbs of Portland, a cheap second-story office with a few small rooms and cardboard boxes piled in one corner next to a few chairs near the secretary’s desk. No standing on ceremony for Dr. P., a woman shaped like an apple, with a halo of strawberry hair; she just stuck her head out of one of the rooms and called me in.

First we talked: the entire history of the headache, my family medical history, the medications I’d taken, how I felt right then. When I tried to explain that I sometimes felt like I had a headache without actually having pain, she knew what I meant. She heard this a lot—that something feels

wrong in the head in an uncertain way. All she does is headaches; the only patients she sees are patients like me, struggling to explain the way it feels inside our heads, stumbling over words because each thought is work. It was only after we had talked for forty-five minutes that she examined my reflexes, balance, gait, grip strength, cranial-nerve function.

Finally, she pressed on my shoulders for a moment and stepped back. "I'm quite sure this is hemicrania. The indomethacin didn't work perfectly because you couldn't take a high enough dose." She had seen it before. We discussed alternative drugs, one of which, topiramate, is known to cause memory and speech problems. She suggested lamotrigine, another anticonvulsant, instead, noting that I would have to increase the dose very slowly. Lamotrigine has interesting side effects—behavioral changes, nausea, double vision, and the rare Stevens-Johnson syndrome, a widespread inflammatory reaction in which large sections of skin blister and slough off. Lamotrigine can also cause headaches.

I winced at her description.

"How long do I need to take it?"

"I hope I can talk you into a year," she answered. "Sometimes hemicrania just burns itself out. Sometimes it doesn't."

The quiet paring of disease, the fraying at the edges of liver and heart, the vision slowly blurring, the cough that sticks around. Sometimes we can only rely on a kind of maladaptation. We get used to it.

All along, I have written about my headache, as though it were a possession, something I could grasp. This headache has been my close companion for a while now; we are intimate. I'm not a migraineur; I'm not a clusterhead. Perhaps hemicrania is not that uncommon, but I've never met anyone else who has it. That my doctor even knew enough to suspect it is to her credit; most doctors and nurses I know have never heard of it. Most have never heard of chronic daily headache, and several have asked me, "So when someone tells me they've had a headache for years, maybe I should believe them?" Yes, I say. Believe them.

I'm on a drug that is not benign; I've gained some weight, and my blood pressure has gone up a bit. I am still occasionally dizzy, and, for the first time in my life, I'm sensitive to the sun. Only months after I began taking lamotrigine did I suddenly remember that it is sometimes used for mood disorders; now and then I wonder how much of my sense of well-being is just the chemical. But it helps. Reading my journal from the spring, I find it hard to accept my

fragile handwriting, the daily recording of what felt like slow destruction. I don't have a headache most of the time now, and not having a headache is like being twenty years younger. I have energy and good cheer and I can hike and travel. I can write again, at last. Then the surge comes. I stop, hold my hand against my temple, cupping my eye. I stand still for a moment, feeling the pain scrape across the bone above my eye and fade. And then I forget again. ■

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OUR TOWN

How Roger Barker made Oskaloosa, Kansas, his laboratory
By Ariel Sabar

Not long after moving to Oskaloosa, a town of 725 people in the hills of northeastern Kansas, Roger Barker, the new chair of the psychology department at the University of Kansas, approached a young couple who lived near him with a request: Might a group of researchers follow their seven-year-old son around for a day, documenting the boy's every word and movement?

Jack Birch, a salesman at the town hardware store, and his wife, Joan, a clerk at the county courthouse, said yes, and on April 26, 1949, eight observers with timers and clipboards, working in half-hour shifts, assembled a minute-by-minute account of an ordinary day in the life of Raymond Birch.

Harper & Row published the report in 1951 as *One Boy's Day*. An editor of *The New York Times Magazine* found the book interesting enough to pay Oskaloosa a visit. In an

Ariel Sabar is the author of *My Father's Paradise*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Autobiography. This is his first article for Harper's Magazine.



August 1951 article she rhapsodized about how Barker and his colleagues "brought child psychology out of the laboratory to study children in their natural habitat, much as a botanist goes into the fields to study flowers." Townspeople knew the good that came from agricultural research stations, so

they accepted "the idea that perhaps some day as much can be known about raising children as raising corn."

For all but a few of the book's 435 pages, Barker and his co-author, the psychologist Herbert F. Wright, offer nothing more than an unadorned ticktock narrative.

7:00. Mrs. Birch said with pleasant casualness, "Raymond wake up." With a little more urgency in her voice she spoke again: "Son, are you going to school today?"

7:01. Raymond picked up a sock and began tugging and pulling it on his left foot. As his mother watched him she said kiddingly, "Can't you get your peepers open?" ... He

said plaintively, "Mommie," and continued mumbling in an unintelligible way something about his undershirt.

7:07. Raymond turned to his dresser and rummaged around among the things on it until he obtained a candy Easter egg. He held up the candy

and commanded, "Sit up, Honey, sit up." The dog obeyed promptly and Raymond pushed the candy into her mouth.

7:08. He came out of the bathroom carrying a bottle of hair oil.

7:09. Mr. Birch patted Raymond on the back, then turned and started toward the kitchen. On his way to the kitchen, Mr. Birch called out, teasingly, "Well, let's get on the stick, Bub ..." Raymond said nothing, just went on combing his hair.

An hour and a half—and some forty pages deeper—into Raymond's day, we see a girl chase him on his way to school.

Raymond, looking a little sheepish ... stopped right where he was, beside the bushes. He seemed reluctant to join the girls, yet appeared not to know quite what to do with himself since Susan had stopped chasing him. As he stood there, he picked a leaf off a bush, put it in his mouth, and nibbled on it.

In the evening, a researcher enters the Birches' washroom as Raymond's mother gives him a bath: "Raymond concentrated his attention on one toe of his left foot. He rubbed the soap back and forth, sawing away between his toes."

The Birches gave the researchers seemingly unlimited access to their lives—a measure of how deeply Barker and his team of scientists, most of whom had moved to Oskaloosa within the previous two years, had insinuated themselves into the social fabric of the town. Barker, in the preface to *One Boy's Day*, writes that the book "marks ... a milestone in the degree of participation of a whole community in a scientific undertaking." But the book was just the start. Barker hoped to map the lives of all 119 of Oskaloosa's children—and eventually those of its adults as well. He wanted nothing less than a psychological portrait of an entire town.

Oskaloosa covers a mere square mile, but it sits on a kind of pedestal. At its borders the streets abruptly stop and the land drops off into Ozarks-like hill country. It's a thirty-minute drive along a two-lane road to the nearest major highway, I-70, which runs west to

Topeka and east to Kansas City. Oskaloosa is one of the only county seats in Kansas without a railroad depot.

The town of modest wooden houses was built around a leafy square with a Victorian courthouse at its center. When Barker arrived in the late 1940s, there was a drugstore with a soda fountain, a Farm Bureau office, a bank, two beauty parlors, a tavern, an auto-supply shop, a law practice, a post office, a coffee shop. The Oska Theatre screened two features a day, and the American Legion hall hosted a Saturday-night dance. "If you were to take a bicycle ride with a ten-year-old boy," Barker said, "he could show you every house in the town in a half hour."

Barker planned to stay awhile. After he was hired by the University of Kansas, Barker and his family moved into a tumbledown firetrap a few blocks from the Oskaloosa courthouse. (Barker's daughter, Celia, later recalled that electrical wiring dangled from the ceilings.) Then he rented a suite of offices, on the second floor of a former bank building on the square, and remade it into the human observatory of which he'd long dreamed. He named it the Midwest Psychological Field Station, and in his publications he called Oskaloosa "Midwest"—a pseudonym that cast the town as an archetype.

The job of selling Oskaloosa on a townwide study fell to Herbert Wright, whom Barker had hired away from Carleton College. Wright was a Midwestern minister's son and a World War II veteran, a raconteur with a baritone voice. He was in many ways the perfect complement to Barker, a quiet, slender man with pale blue eyes and a limp from a childhood bone disease.

In the middle of a wretched September hot spell, Wright rang the doorbells of four prominent Oskaloosans Barker had deemed critical to winning over the town: the Methodist minister, the state senator, the school superintendent, and the editor of the local newspaper.

According to a diary he kept of these first contacts, Wright explained to the men that he and Professor Barker were looking for "a small, representative American community" where they might study "how children

actually behave in real-life situations." The little written on the subject, he said, concerned children in big cities near major universities. That was "unfortunate," Wright said, "because a large share of the more important people in our country"—General Eisenhower of Abilene and President Truman of Independence were Barker's favorite examples—"come from rural localities."

Might Oskaloosa be suitable for such a study?

The town fathers liked that tiny Oskaloosa might have something to contribute to science. "To say the least, these people appeared to take their children, and children in general, seriously, and to consider them worth study," Wright noted. All the same, "I'm sure that when I left them, they were still wondering eagerly what in the world our next steps might be."

Once Wright had seeded the soil, Barker gave a talk at the Rotary Club. In the age of the atomic bomb, he told the town's Rotarians, it was more important than ever to understand how children got along. As the *Oskaloosa Independent* reported in November 1947:

Mr. Barker mentioned that the children of Oskaloosa were selected for study because they are considered typical of the children of Kansas, and the Kansas children, according to statistics, grow up to be better adjusted than those of the nation at large.

(The story ran atop the front page, between notices about a high school football game and the arrest of three men on charges of wheat theft.) By comparing the lives of children in Oskaloosa with those of children in other communities, "the investigators hope eventually to be able to give some pointers on how children develop into good citizens" and "why children in places like Oskaloosa turn out so well." None of their discoveries, Barker predicted, would come as a surprise. He was interested only in "getting down in exact form things that are common knowledge to the people of Oskaloosa."

But doubts persisted. Oskaloosa was more accustomed to farmers in bib overalls than to professors in tweed.

Rumors circulated that the Barkers were Soviet spies. One mother issued Barker's field workers a firm warning. "You'll be watching us," she said, "but don't forget: we'll be watching you."

Barker's wife, Louise, a warm and voluble woman, became the project's ambassador at women's clubs and met one-on-one with families with young children. The Barkers and the Wrights—and soon other researchers—enrolled their children in the public schools. Barker's son, Jonathan, later said conversations at the dinner table could at times resemble an ethnographic fieldwork debriefing. The families joined church choirs and bridge clubs, as well as the American Legion, the Eastern Star, and other civic organizations. They shopped on the square and hired local women as typists and high school students as janitors.

The psychologists worried that their immersion in Oskaloosa's everyday life might compromise the "naturally occurring behavior" of the "free-ranging persons" they hoped to observe. But their gamble earned the town's trust. "The smartest thing you people have done was to come out here to live," one Oskaloosa father told them. "You never could have done what you have if you had just come up a few hours at a time from Lawrence"—where the University of Kansas is, a half hour's drive to the southeast.

Before long, the sight of clipboard-toting researchers quietly taking notes became a fixture of town life. When a mother saw her eight-year-old daughter playing with one friend while a second sat silently off to one side, she scolded her child for leaving the other girl out. "Oh, that's all right," her daughter replied. "She's the psychologist." When the mother took a closer look, she noticed that the other girl was busily pretending to make notes on her friends' play.

Barker's methods were well outside his discipline's mainstream. B. F. Skinner, Edward Tolman, and the other giants of midcentury psychology were sending rats through mazes, clocking human reaction times, and administering personality

and I.Q. tests. Most research psychologists saw the controlled experiment as the only path to truth—and respect—for a young field still grasping for legitimacy.

Barker had a Ph.D. from Stanford and had taught at Harvard, but he had grown up among farmers and tradesmen in small-town Iowa, and the lab struck him as a refuge for cosseted elites. Behavior was a natural phenomenon, he argued, not a set of tricks that "subjects" performed in the artificial, highly manipulated confines of the laboratory.

"Although we have daily records of the oxygen content of river water, of the ground temperatures of cornfields, of the activity of volcanoes, of the behavior of nesting robins," Barker wrote,

there have been few scientific records of how human mothers care for their young, how teachers behave in the classroom (and how the children respond), what families actually do and say during mealtime, or how children live their lives from the time they wake in the morning until they go to sleep at night.

One Boy's Day was the first of eight books Barker and his colleagues would write about Oskaloosa, and it remains in many ways the most striking. In the introduction, Barker and Wright note that on the day of the study "nothing out of the ordinary happened." It was just another Tuesday in a small town. Aside from a brief description of "Midwest," *One Boy's Day* offers no context, no analysis, and no conclusion. All the same, Barker insists in the book's defiant first sentence, "*One Boy's Day* is a scientific document."

Stretches of the book are mind-numbingly granular:

9:52. Using his thumb and forefinger and dropping his jaw, he tried to press his cheeks together so that they would meet between his teeth. He exerted much effort in the attempt.

But other moments capture the beautiful exuberance of a certain strain of American boyhood. Near the courthouse flagpole before school, Raymond finds a baseball bat in the grass and picks it up. "Oh,

boy!" he says. He tosses a stone in the air and swings, but accidentally clips the flagpole.

8:24... This made a wonderful, hollow, ringing noise, so he proceeded to hit the flagpole again.

8:25. He went around and around and around the pole, hitting it with the bat as he did so, until he became so dizzy that he fell down, bat and all.

Raymond's day spans thirteen hours and thirty-three minutes. He mumbles with a mouth full of toast at breakfast. He claps along to the song "Mister Sun" in music class, and though his teacher whispers, "Softer," the observers report that "there was no perceptible difference in the volume of Raymond's clapping." When a teacher announces recess, he "popped out of his seat as if jet-propelled." After school, he and a few other boys play games like "big gorilla," "monkeys in a cage," and "bombs away." After a supper of hamburger patties and creamed potatoes, with chocolate sandwich cookies for dessert, Mrs. Birch orders her son to the piano.

When Raymond finished a brief series of notes, he looked up at his mother expectantly. He twisted his whole body so that he was looking almost straight up into her face. Her concise order was, "Once more."

Finally at 8:25 P.M., Mrs. Birch sends Raymond to bed.

The book is filled with allusions to the theater. The authors describe the town as "the stage upon which [Raymond] played his roles." The parts of Raymond's day—"Getting up," "Going to School"—are "scenes"; Midwest is "The Setting." A list of Raymond's family members, neighbors, and friends is formatted like a *dramatis personae*. And when Barker peeked out from behind the curtain, he saw an audience that included not only social scientists but also "artists and laymen who are interested in the contemporary scene."

Barker wanted to democratize psychology, to strip away its pretenses. The simple language of *One Boy's Day* was insurance against intellectual faddishness. "Barring a revolution in written English and in the

social conventions of Western mankind," he wrote, "our recorded day in the life ... will have the same meaning in 2055 as it has now in 1955." Scientists, artists, and others might use it in any number of unforeseen ways. "Theoretically neutral" records like his, he felt, merited preservation in a "museum of human behavior" that would be psychology's answer to the natural-history museum or the herbarium.

Barker completed several more day-in-the-life studies, but he eventually abandoned his plan to observe all of Oskaloosa's children. The studies' demanding logistics and the "public relations problem," as he put it, of obtaining permission to shadow children made them impractical, but the daylong "specimen records" also brought Barker to a new insight: psychology needed to dispense not only with the lab but with individual human subjects altogether. "[W]e shed the blinders of individual psychology, and it became clear that how a child behaves is not only determined by what he or she wants to do but by where he or she is," Barker recalled in an interview with the *Journal of Counseling & Development* in the late 1980s.

For example, Raymond could not ride his bicycle, as he clearly wanted to, in the courthouse where his mother worked (the stairs and the "rules" were absolute barriers). We also observed that there was more similarity in the behavior of Raymond and Roy in arithmetic class than between Raymond in arithmetic and Raymond in recess. How could we account for this? Obviously, recess "did something" to Raymond.

Recess and the courthouse were what Barker soon termed "behavior settings"—places that induced predictable patterns of behavior. But how many other behavior settings did Oskaloosa have? Barker wanted a map of every public place in town, and he wanted to know precisely what people were saying and doing in each of them.

The field-station workers clipped event announcements, photographs, and meeting notices from the *Independent*. They collated programs from

church services and school assemblies. They compiled lists of bridge-club members, schedules for bingo games, and minutes of 4-H meetings. Graduate students recorded the goings-on at high school basketball games, the shoe-repair shop, and every other place, from the school's utility room to the Methodist church's Ladies' Aid Sunday Evening Film. Barker guarded these primary documents with an archivist's zeal. At the end of each day, he locked them behind the steel doors of the former bank's vault; to lessen the risk of fire, he ordered his staff to unplug every electric device before going home.

As Oskaloosa's ephemera piled higher and higher, the psychologists realized they needed to impose order on the welter of source material. The plain language of *One Boy's Day*, fine for a twenty-four-hour observation, gave way to the sort of specialized lingo—"occupancy time," "penetration," "participation range," "territorial index"—Barker had once rejected. The data analysis became so complex that Barker acquired an IBM Type 075 Card Counting Sorter. It was so heavy—several hundred pounds—that the shippers refused to carry it up the office steps, leaving the job to grad students and professors. (One student, Phil Schoggen, later a professor at Cornell, remembered that it was his wife's job to stand on the sidewalk and warn away passersby "in case the rig gave way and the whole thing came crashing down.")

The first round of calculations showed that in a town of one square mile there were no fewer than 585 public settings where Oskaloosans gathered at least once a year. The list ran from small spots like Tills' Watch Repair and Mrs. Matson's Home Laundry to big ones like the football field.

As Barker scoured this first "behavior setting survey," he began to see that each place had what he came to call a "standing pattern of behavior." These patterns held up, meeting after meeting, basketball game after basketball game, church service after church service, regardless of who showed up and who was in charge.

The repercussions for psychology seemed profound: if you wanted to know how people were behaving, it was less important to know *who* they

were than *where* they were. An individual's emotions, motivations, and life history were secondary to his or her location. A school wasn't just some classrooms and a gym, but a context whose physical layout and social forces shaped—or, in Barker's stronger language, "coerced"—the actions of the students.

The kid who'd rather be fishing and the great-grandmother mourning her husband may have very different thoughts as they sit through a sermon. But their outward behavior looks remarkably similar. As Barker wrote in a 1968 book, *Ecological Psychology*, "All inhabitants of the genotype Drugstore behave drugstore, and all inhabitants of a Tavern behave tavern." Or, as he wrote elsewhere: "One can hardly avoid, even with the strongest intentions, doing as the Romans do when one is in Rome."

School hallways—narrow and without chairs or ledges—encourage walking and deter sitting or lying down. Wide, open surfaces like the football field, courthouse lawn, and school gym invite running and exuberant play. If you try too hard to resist such forces, built-in regulatory systems either nudge you back in line or kick you out. Barker called these correctives "deviation-countering mechanisms" and "vetoing mechanisms." Bridge clubs turn away poker players. Teachers shush loudmouths, and if that doesn't work, principals expel them.

Lawmakers, the police, and other "practitioners of motivation" grasped these principles instinctively, Barker wrote. Ban knife possession by minors and you'll have fewer stabbings. Paint double lines on highways and you'll have fewer head-on collisions. "In all these cases, the aim is to ensure 'good' behavior by rearranging 'outside' conditions." (Barker saw no point to inner change, lumping psychotherapists and preachers together "among the few practitioners who aim to control the behavior of others by altering conditions within the person.")

For a while, Barker gave every appearance of carving a new path in psychology. From 1947 to 1958, he won more than \$260,000 in research grants—an enormous sum for his era,

much of it from the newly established National Institute of Mental Health. Margaret Mead dropped by the Midwest Psychological Field Station, as did foundation presidents, bureaucrats from Washington, and researchers from universities the world over.

In 1963, Barker received the American Psychological Association's Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award (later recipients included Jean Piaget and Noam Chomsky) and the NIMH gave him its career research award—a kind of genius grant that freed Barker from the distractions of teaching and paid his salary for as many years as he was willing to work.

The following year, Barker and another member of the psychology department, Paul Gump, published *Big School, Small School*, a critique of Kansas's growing enthusiasm for school consolidation. The notion that bigger was better, they argued, was false. In a three-year study, they ran behavior-setting surveys of thirteen high schools in eastern Kansas, with student populations ranging from thirty-five to 2,287. Smaller schools may have lacked, say, swim lessons, health clinics, and sculpture classes, but in most respects they offered the same broad categories of opportunities as bigger schools, and with an important advantage: they actually got students to take part. In the smallest schools, 53 percent of seniors reported participating in five or more kinds of extracurricular activities; in the largest schools, just 4 percent did.

Barker saw participation as critical to a child's development. Small schools made students feel competent and needed: you didn't have to be unusually gifted to play in the band, act in the play, or make the football team.

Barker eventually turned his findings into a general theory of the relationship between place size, population, and behavior. Because less populous places have more settings per capita to keep up than do larger ones, they put more pressure on each individual both to participate and to lead. The fewer people in a place, the more "claims" the habitat makes on each person and the more roles ("per-

formances," in Barker's terminology) each has to play. Shorthandedness, or "undermanning," as Barker called it, was a virtue. Small towns—and small schools and churches—had so few people that they couldn't afford to exclude or discriminate. You might not like your neighbor, but to keep the town going, you learned to get along. You mowed her lawn and she looked after your kids, and in the evenings you took adjoining seats on the school board.

Barker came to believe that nothing less than our national character was at stake in the survival of towns like Oskaloosa. America had from its birth been a place with too much work and too few people. On the frontier, settlers had scraped together livelihoods and civic institutions in an "unfinished" land. The demands of the physical environment, Barker thought, were the bedrock of our egalitarianism and our democracy. With enough behavior-setting surveys, scientists might one day arrive at a set of ideal sizes for various kinds of institutions and communities—schools, businesses, churches, towns, even nations.

But Barker's hoped-for revolution in psychology never came. Behavior-setting surveys and day-in-the-life studies are expensive, labor-intensive, and time-consuming. In the 1960s, advances in computer science, linguistics, and neuroscience shifted the field away from its focus on observable behavior toward the inner workings of the mind.

As time went on, even loyal benefactors seemed at a loss about precisely what to do with him. In denying one grant application, an NIMH official wrote that Barker's studies "seemed to bear no relation to the work of other investigators or to relevant bodies of sociological and anthropological theory."

Barker died, in Oskaloosa, in September 1990, at the age of eighty-seven. Toward the end of his life, he, too, began to question some of his early formulations. He had once argued that behavior settings did not depend for their survival on any single individual. When one person leaves, the setting "coerces" others to pick up the slack, and life goes on much as be-

fore. The sharpest rebuke to that theory, however, was the fate of Barker's field station itself. Though his colleagues tried to keep it open with new grants, it could not survive without him. The Midwest Psychological Field Station closed in 1972, running out of money the very year its founder retired.

When I visited Oskaloosa, in December 2010, the town no longer seemed profitably "undermanned." Its population had grown only slightly since *One Boy's Day*, to about 1,100, but many of Barker's behavior settings had vanished.

I had a map of local businesses from the 1940s that I'd copied from Barker's voluminous archives, which are housed at the University of Kansas. Gone now from the square are the bandstand, the hotel, and the grocery stores. In 1960, a tornado destroyed the town's majestic courthouse; its replacement is an insipid modern box. The Oskaloosa Theatre has been dark for decades.

Parker's variety store, one of Oskaloosa's oldest retailers, remains, but it closed its century-old pharmacy a few years ago. (The store's name recently changed to Country Corner Variety.) Barker considered the variety store the town's most important setting. Many Oskaloosans I spoke to still see it that way. "If that ever closes," Frances Snell, a third-generation Oskaloosan and former member of the town council and the school board, told me, only half jokingly, "we'll just have to shut the town down."

The courthouse and county offices keep alive a couple of small restaurants, a bank, a law firm, and a bar called Stinkys Other Side. But most townspeople told me that they do their shopping in Lawrence or Topeka.

A dozen older Oskaloosans agreed to meet me at the local genealogical society one afternoon to talk about changes in the town since Barker's day. Donna Ward, a retired county register of deeds, told me about a photograph she has of her mother and around a hundred other students at Sunday school at the Presbyterian church. "Now we're lucky if we have sixteen at Sunday worship. And we don't have Sunday school."

A raft of social organizations and women's auxiliaries have disappeared. "Several clubs were really good and just kind of died on the vine," said Nancy Reed, a retired accountant. "It was lack of participation, and age, and the fact that women went to work."

According to the U.S. Census, 1950 was the first decade in which Kansas's urban population was greater than its rural one. Barker had settled in "Midwest" at almost the precise moment small towns began to fade from the American landscape. New interstates allowed for longer commutes. Television and air-conditioning sucked people off porches and into living rooms. Large chain stores began pecking away at the livelihoods of family-owned shops on town squares.

Barker's books, still available in the town's tiny library, are a record of how much has been lost. Together with the documents and photographs in Barker's archive at the University of Kansas, they offer a richly hued portrait of a Midwestern town at midcentury and of that town's chief booster, a man who exalted the small and the ordinary.

Raymond Birch" is a pseudonym; the field station cloaked not only the town's identity but also that of everyone in it. When I first phoned people in Oskaloosa, most said they had no recollection of the boy's real name. Some took a guess, but none of these bore out.

Eventually I got an email from a woman I had not contacted. She wrote that her late mother had told her that their long-ago neighbor had been "the child referred to in a book written by a KU professor." The child's name was Gary Morgan. He now lived in a small town in western Pennsylvania.

I found an unlisted phone number for Morgan and called it. I told the man who picked up that I was interested in discussing *One Boy's Day*. There was a long silence. It was either an unwelcome subject, I feared, or one he hadn't thought about in a long time. Perhaps it was both.

"I remember," the man said finally, then cleared his throat. "I remember waking up one morning and there was a strange person standing in my bedroom with a notepad."

The route to the town where Morgan lives (he asked that I withhold its name) runs past a John Deere dealership, two taxidermists, and a sign announcing the time of the fire department's bingo game. I pulled into the driveway of a vinyl-sided brick trilevel on the main road. Morgan opened the door as I was walking up. He is a trim man of medium height with a graying mustache, red cheeks, and a somewhat impish smile. The boy in the book is now seventy-one years old.

He led me to a pleasant sunroom, where his second wife, Janet, joined us. A wall clock decorated with images of Harley-Davidsons marked each hour with the growl of a revving engine.

Morgan and his family had been living in Oskaloosa for just a couple of years at the time of the study. His father had been a security guard at Hercules Powder in Sunflower, Kansas, but lost his job when the company, an explosives manufacturer, laid off workers after World War II. A hardware store in Oskaloosa hired him as a salesman, and the family moved to town when Morgan was in first grade. He was an only child.

"Even though we weren't quite as innocent as maybe Norman Rockwell painted," he said, "we were still a lot more innocent than today's standards." He remembered that people set pies on their windowsills to cool, and that when the owner of the lumberyard went fishing in the middle of the day, customers took what they needed and left cash on the counter.

His memories of the Barker study, however, were less sunny. Though *One Boy's Day* reports that Birch's parents explained the study to the boy the night before, Morgan remembers feeling blindsided when he woke up. "I was very embarrassed that I had to get dressed in front of some stranger," he said.

But as the day wore on, the book shows, he grew accustomed to and even solicitous of his pursuers. He flashes them shy smiles, holds doors, and offers one a glass of water. He tells his mother he wants to be "one of those"—a psychologist—when he grows up and performs a series of bike tricks to impress them. "I probably had a swelled head because somebody was following me around," Morgan said.

All the same, he has never read beyond the book's initial pages. He is discomfited by the existence of so unvarnished a record of his seven-year-old self, he told me, and has trouble seeing its usefulness. I appeared to be the first person outside his family to have asked about it.

The Morgans left Oskaloosa when Gary was in the seventh grade, after his father got a job in a nearby town. "I lost track of everyone I went to school with and didn't try to keep in touch," he said. "I moved on." Because of another job transfer, the family moved again, to western Maryland. Morgan worked as a right-of-way representative for a Pennsylvania power company until 1997, when he retired following a series of heart attacks.

Toward the end of my visit, Morgan led me to a bookcase in his living room. From a shelf filled with pulp fiction and glossy romance novels, he took down a jacketless hardcover with browning pages: a copy of *One Boy's Day*. Barker, Wright, and their wives had signed the first page. One of them, probably Barker, had added this inscription: "To the Morgans, especially Gary, the real author of this." ■

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LOYALTY

By Charles Baxter

As much as I love her, I blame Astrid. Astrid told my wife, Corinne, that she could achieve happiness if only she'd leave me. It sounded simple. "Leave that guy, walk out that door, you'll achieve happiness, you'll be free." *Achieve happiness.* Now there's a phrase. Into the Ford with the busted shocks and out onto the American road, then—that was the prescription.

I stood in the driveway. It was sleeting the day she left. I had agreed not to follow her. She was so eager to go, she forgot to use the windshield wipers until she was halfway down the block. She turned the corner, the tires splashed slush, the front end dipped from the bad shocks, and she was gone.

Charles Baxter's most recent book is *Gryphon: New and Selected Stories*. His poem "The Arrow by Day" appeared in the June 2011 issue of *Harper's Magazine*.



Holding on to my son, I walked into the garage. Blank-faced, I took an inventory. Jeremy, in my arms. My rusting pickup truck. The broken rake, the bent saw, the corroded timing light still on the ledge beneath the back window

with the curtains. Yes, the garage window had curtains. Don't ask me why I put them there. More inventory: the house itself. My life. My health. My job. A case of beer. My mother, Dolores, upstairs in her room. *Let them arrive here, whatever they are* is my first motto, and my second is *Let them stay*.

Astrid thought that happiness was within poor Corinne's grasp, and she said so, day after day. Happiness for you, she would say, is a day without Wes. You are right to say that Wes crowds you and confuses you. Any morning you wake up without that guy's stale beer breath on you will be pure profit. Astrid

was relentless on the subject of me. She and Corinne worked at the same nurses' station, 3-F. In the quiet of the hospital night, plans were hatched. A nurse can always get a job, anyplace. Those were Astrid's words, I have no doubt.

Corinne had been bitching about me, to me, and the topics were, I don't know, the usual. I drank too much on weekends, my dog Scooter slobbered on the bedroom floor, my hands were always dirty from the shop—and the killer accusation: *I was inattentive to her needs*, whatever they were. Mostly Corinne complained about herself, her rickety soiled unrecognizable life, her confusion, her panic over our baby, her fear of being an inadequate mother, her sadness, that stuff.

But I loved her, and she left me. Then I loved Astrid, and I married her. I'm married to her now, and I still love her. She has—and I've got to use this word—guile. Corinne, my first wife, had none. You'd think a nurse of all people could take care of her own baby and not be bewildered. But she was. Mousy brown hair, mystified by most conversations, unable to fix a dinner you could serve to guests, she was about the most lovable thing you ever saw. I lost my heart to her helplessness time and again. I'm not saying this is admirable.

The minute Corinne was gone, Astrid showed up. I don't recall that, prior to that day, we had so much as exchanged a moody, sparking glance. She took me into her expert arms. It was consolation and sympathy at first, I guess. I didn't question it. In about the time it takes to change the painted background in a photographer's studio from a woodland scene to a brick wall, she had left her boyfriend and was presenting me with casseroles and opened bottles of cold beer. I took some advantage of her, but she didn't mind my advances. She was saying, "Wes, it seems you are the one. I *am* surprised." She discounted the flaws I owned up to. My first wife lost her credibility as a character witness, and I got a spell cast on me. And then I softened. Love for Astrid like a climbing vine grew out of my heart. I don't know how else to say it.

She was competent and assured with child rearing, calm in the face of infant tantrums. On Sunday morning, next to me, Astrid would read the travel section, pencil in hand, naming far-flung places we would go someday. In this household, confusion was dispelled. Now we had pedestals. Things like clarity and plans and pleasure and love

went on top of them. What luck I'd been given, I thought. Here was all this day-in-day-out whoopee. Astrid brought all surfaces to an unlikely shine. Jeremy stopped yelling all the time and began to grow. Teeth, toddling, jabber, talk.

New toys appeared. The divorce went through without Corinne wanting any custody whatsoever or getting any. Astrid and I married, and pretty soon we had ourselves another child, a startlingly beautiful daughter. Lucy. A new path, the next stage. Corinne called Jeremy when he was grown enough to talk, but she couldn't manage to see him, or so she said in her jumbled, haphazard way. She was too delicate, and she claimed her strings were too tightly strung for ordinary social life. Visits would put stress on her immune system. Anyway she couldn't manage them, or so she said. Jeremy suffered from this absence, but when it became permanent, he didn't suffer anymore because Astrid had taken over the mom chores with such competence and love. So Corinne called instead of visiting, and mostly she wrote letters. My God, those letters! Moms aren't supposed to write letters like that. The coffee spills, the anarchy handwriting, the paragraphs without topics, the sentences without subjects and verbs. Jeremy's letters back to Corinne were full of the news of his childhood. After a while, his letters became very halfhearted, quoting baseball statistics. He wrote them with decreasing frequency.

The time when Corinne went on daytime TV, the show was about runaway moms. She sat on the stage with three other women. What made her willing to appear there, I'll never know. For the first ten minutes, the foppish host of the show and the question-askers from the audience sounded reasonable and sympathetic, but by the end of the hour, they were indignant. Out in the peanut gallery they were pointing fingers and shouting at the runaway moms, and others applauded and woofed when the accusations concluded. I only heard about it from a neighbor who watches TV all day and who said that Corinne's hair was darker than she remembered it, with gray streaks. I felt terrible for Corinne, for her eager incompetence and wish to be on national television. I could imagine her befud-

dled face as she sat there being razzed by hooligans in the studio.

Dolores, my mother, came to live with us in the spare room upstairs right before Corinne left. She said she'd help with Jeremy, and she did for a while. Mostly she stayed up there knitting and staring out the window, checking for strangers to our neighborhood, including door-to-door salesmen. On Thursdays she would go to her bridge club and on Friday nights to Bible study. Despite her name (*dolores* means "sad" according to the Latin), my mother is quite upbeat. *Take a chance on life* is her motto. She and Astrid bonded immediately. She has tried to keep it a secret from me, but I know my mother was and is interested in extraterrestrials (although she is a registered Republican) and believes that Jesus will be back any day now. She imagines that we are in the end-time and must meet the challenges of life with Christian dignity. Astrid humors her, though they avoid this topic when I am in the room.

My mother's help was not required after our daughter, Lucy, was born. But Lucy was never any trouble at all. She could have raised herself. She came out of the birth canal with an accusing look on her face directed at me.

Jeremy is seventeen and has a tattoo of a Japanese word on his left calf. I still don't know what it means, and he won't say. On his hip is another tiny tattoo, a grinning gremlin, hands on hips. It's illegal for children and adolescents to get tattoos, but he evidently got them in a low place known only to his set. I read Jeremy the riot act that time he came home with the Japanese character but was treated with amused, affectionate scorn, as if I were a historical artifact. Get this: in deep winter he's been known to wear a sweatshirt, jeans, and flip-flops outside. Summer clothes in a snowstorm—a pretense of immortality. He wants to be a young god as they all do and defy the seasons. In Minnesota that's a brave stand, and many teenage boys take it. Therefore he's wildly popular. He has several hundred friends and is constantly texting them. His face has some of the sweet beauty of his mother, Corinne. The three women in the household dote on him. They comb his hair and would tie his shoelaces for him if he'd let them. His little sister sketches his

face when he is sitting down. Imagine the possible result: a spoiled brat. However, he's not really spoiled, just blasé. Naturally he smiles all the time, having done nothing to earn all this love.

He looks past me as if I were a footnote.

The point is, Corinne is back in town, and we have a situation on our hands. She has sent a postcard saying that she will be arriving by bus, and so I take a few hours off from work at the garage to go downtown to get her. Explanations for her arrival? None. Some idea of what the agenda might be? Not a clue. Her arrival has no more rationale than her departure did all those years ago.

Although I am not secretive by nature, I have told no one else in the house about Corinne's reappearance. When I arrive at the Greyhound station on Hawthorne Avenue, I enter the doors and smell that rich bus-station smell of humus mixed with nitrates. You feel like editorializing on humanity when you enter a bus station. But you don't, because Corinne is already sitting there, waiting on a bench. She has two brown paper bags with her. Soiled clothes are peeking out of the tops of the bags, sweaters and unmentionables, and she's staring at the wall clock.

And here I must try to describe my ex-wife in her current condition.

Imagine a beautiful woman of middle age who has somehow gone through a car wash. She has dried out, but the car wash has rumped her up, left the hair going every which way, and on her face is a dazed expression and she has new parallel lines on her forehead and crow's-feet around her eyes. Life has worried and picked at her. But that's not the point. The point is that she's still beautiful to me, which is strange. It's counter to common sense.

She's wearing a pink sweatshirt with the name of a TV show printed on it. It's the TV show she was on and where she was mocked. The show's name is the name of the small-minded and mean millionaire host with the thin mustache. Corinne looks up at me as I take her hand. She stands audibly. She kisses me on the cheek. For that instant her warm lips are familiar. I feel an antiquated tingle.

"Wes," she says, "I knew you'd save me."

"Haven't saved you yet, Corinne," I say, trying to laugh it off. She smells of french fries and hamburger and ketchup. A fast-food smell. The poor soul. What's happened to her? "How are you?"

"How am I? As you can see."

I don't say anything in the face of the incomparable wreckage she presents.

"Well," she says, "is the inspection over? Would you take one of these bags? I'll take the other." She picks up one of the aforementioned bags, and when I look down I see that her shoes are split at the seams. Through the hole in her left shoe, toes are visible.

My first wife has become a bag lady, and here she is.

This is what she says in the truck on the way back to the house.

"It's the economy. There's suffering. You were always a grease monkey, Wes, and you could always get a job fixing cars. So you wouldn't know. But they're making it really personal in my case and saying that I can't keep track of things. Perhaps I *was* losing track, but only in the afternoons when I was off by myself, and the experts wouldn't deny that, although they tried to. In a way, the multinational banks did this to me, because I couldn't live on my income and I was eventually fired from the hospital, and even though sorrow isn't necessarily contagious, I know I caught it directly from one of my patients. He was a man who groaned all day. The groans got into my head and took up residence there. I'm hearing them now. Can you hear them? No? Lucky you. God bless you for picking me up, Wes. I know I should have given you more of a warning, but I couldn't. My goodness, it's cold." She wraps a scarf around her neck. But it's *not* cold. The cold is all in her head. It's a warm and humid early-October day, seventy degrees. Indian summer. To stay warm and to give herself a greenhouse effect, she's wrapped herself up like a mummy.

"That's all right, Corinne," I tell her. "Where are you staying, by the way?"

She looks at me.

"What I meant was, how *long* are you staying? Here? With us?"

Gazing out, she says, "American cities are so dirty." She points to an

abandoned, boarded-up drugstore. "I do remember an apothecary, and hereabouts a-dwells," she says meaninglessly, as if she's quoting from somewhere. She breathes in deeply and coughs twice. "Let me tell you a story. There was this woman. And she was just fine for a while, and her husband was just fine, too, and no one was to blame for anything. Let's say this happened in the past. They lived in comfort and kindness with each other. But then something happened. Let's say a volcano erupted. And she never knew what happened, I mean who caused the volcano, but she knew something *did* happen, because gradually she was *never* fine. The dust made her cough, and the water seemed to be poisoned, and the air smelled terrible, of lava, and there were voices, and she realized she had made a big mistake bringing a child into the world. Into this world, my God, how terrible it is, and no one has any idea."

"Oh, Corinne," is all I can say. Trouble is waiting for me patiently at home. Because I have not told Astrid, my wife, or Dolores, my mother, or Jeremy, my son, or Lucy, my daughter, that Corinne is in town, there will be tribulation. Why couldn't I tell anyone that I was going to the bus station to pick her up? I know why. Give me some credit. After all these years, I wanted to see her, and therefore I *would* see her. I had forgiven her. I forgive her now. But would *they*? It was a bad bet. Still, I am the head of the household.

She pulls down the sun visor and moves the little slide to the left and looks at herself in the visor's mirror, primping her hair. "They've done things to me. They don't let up."

"I know."

"Wes," she says, turning to face me, "I can't help it. I need taking care of for a time." The neutrality on her face has vanished. There is another expression there now. It is one of supplication such as you see from homeless veterans on street corners. *Supplication*. Does anybody ever use that word in normal life? I doubt it. "There's something I want you to do," she says, but then she won't say what it is. "Is this your neighborhood?" she asks.

"We're getting there," I say.

Houses pass by, old houses with large front porches, and I note a

screech from my F-150's engine, a loose fan belt.

"Yes, did you ever think of me?"

It's a trick question. They are always asking you for outright expressions of affection and love. But I have to be careful. My answer may be quoted back to me. For a moment I am spooked.

"Yes, I did think of you. Often."

"Even after you were married to Astrid?"

"Yes." I drive down a full city block before I say, "I worried about you."

This is not the answer she has been fishing for. But she seems to relax and to settle back. On the floor of the truck, on the passenger side, there is an empty beer can I forgot to throw out. With a regal air, she puts her right foot on it to keep it from rolling around.

"I thought that maybe you did. Sometimes I had dreams about you. In the dreams you were a young man, and you were still being kind to me. You carried me once out of a burning apartment house. You did it for free. In the dream."

We pull into the driveway. I can see from the blue Honda Civic parked in the garage that Astrid is already home. My mother—today is Wednesday—will certainly be upstairs in her room knitting a shawl or surfing the Internet for stories about true crime or the coming apocalypse. Jeremy may still be out tomcatting around town with his crazed friends before dinner, but Lucy will be in residence in the living room, reading one of her horse books.

Really, I should take Corinne to a motel until I can figure out what to do with her. But instead I pick up her two brown paper bags. We go in through the side door, stop for a moment in the mudroom, and then go up the three stairs into the kitchen past several pairs of soiled empty shoes. I'm behind her, and I notice how gray her hair has become and how it, too, gives off a fast-food odor.

In the kitchen, Astrid has been sprinkling seasoning onto some salmon when she glances up and sees Corinne, who looks worse than she did a few minutes ago because of the kitchen's overhead light. First Astrid looks at Corinne. Then she looks at me, and then she looks at Corinne again. Expressions pass across her face so quick-

ly that you might think you hadn't seen the previous one before the next one appears. First she's confused: her eyebrows rise up. *Who's that?* Then she's in full recognition mode: her mouth opens, slightly, though she says nothing. Her tongue licks her upper lip. Then it's time for pity and compassion, and her eyes start to water. Then she's shocked, and her hand with lemon juice on it rises to her face. "Uh," she says, but nothing else comes out. A little spot of seasoning stays on her cheek. Then she's angry, and that's when she looks at me, as if I were the cause of all this. But the anger doesn't stay posted up there on her face for long. It's displaced by an expression we don't have a word for. You see this expression when someone is hit by circumstances that are much bigger than expected, and the person is trying to restore things to normal, which can't be done. Actors can't duplicate this look. It only happens in real life.

My wife makes a move toward my ex-wife, to embrace her. I stand there waiting to see whether there will be an implausible hug. But Astrid stops herself in midstep.

Right about then, Lucy sails into the kitchen, heading toward the refrigerator for a diet soft drink. She turns and sees Corinne. "Who're you?" she asks rudely.

No one remembers to say anything in response. Down the street, in the distance, a car alarm goes off, a faint *eee eee eee* sound.

Lucy looks at me, then at her mother, then at Corinne. "What's going on?"

"This," I say at last, pointing at Corinne, "is Jeremy's mother, Corinne. She's here for a visit."

"How do you do?" Corinne says. "You must be Lucy. You look so *clean*. And *bright*. So do you, Astrid," she says, smiling at my wife. "But then you always did. It must be from the hospital. It must be from the disinfectants."

"My God, Corinne," Astrid blurts out. "What happened to you?"

"I died," Corinne says. "And then I got on a bus and came here."

Astrid tells me that she and I need to talk, and we descend into the mudroom to confer. I explain about the postcard, and Astrid nods randomly.

She's angry, of course, that I said that Corinne was, or is, Jeremy's mother. She's even angrier that she's here and that I said nothing about her arrival, but given the strangeness of events, I am temporarily forgiven. We determine that for now Corinne will sleep in the basement rec room's foldout bed. She may find the basement somewhat damp, given her allergic inclinations, but that's life. The dehumidifier does its level best. Then Astrid says to me, "Don't ever do this again," as if Corinne's appearance here is my idea.

"I didn't do it *this* time," I reply.

When we return to the kitchen my mother has descended from her upstairs room and is talking to Corinne as if Corinne had only been away for a few days. My mother is immune to surprise. Those two are conversing quite lucidly on various topics: the weather, and then recipes they once shared, and treatments for the common cold (zinc lozenges). Astrid returns to the salmon. Will there be enough for everyone? Yes, if the portions are small. I instruct Lucy to set the table, which she does, happy to have a task to keep her occupied. I remind her to set an extra place for Corinne. I pick up Corinne's two brown paper bags and take them downstairs, and I fold out the bed and make it up with sheets and blankets that we keep down there in an old dresser near the dehumidifier.

But what I am thinking about is Jeremy, and so I go back upstairs, past the kitchen, into the living room, and then out into the front yard, and I open my cell phone, and I call him, and when he answers, I say, "Get right home."

He says, "I'm almost there. What's up?"

"Something has happened," is all I can say, "and it's about you. I'll explain when you get home."

Corinne broke my heart when she left me, and I was ready to be angry with her for years after that. But day by day the anger seeped out of me in a slow trickle until it was gone. I have to let her remain here if she wants to. She's wreckage. It's as simple as that. We have these obligations to our human ruins. What happened to her could've happened to me or to anybody.

Jeremy, however, possesses neither wisdom nor adult perspective, and my heart is thumping away like a maddened rabbit in a cage as I wait for him to get home. At last I see him coming down the block on his skateboard while he talks on his cell phone.

When I get to the kitchen, he's standing there near the stove, and all the women are looking at him but no one is saying anything. Again, the silence. What's the matter with them? They talk all the time when nothing is on the line, but if something serious happens, they clam up.

"What's going on?" he asks. He looks over at Corinne and nods his head in her direction. "Who's this?" Corinne is standing over there, propped up against the refrigerator.

Again a silence persists. No one will step up to the plate. So I say, "This is Corinne. Corinne, this is Jeremy."

The thing is, they look so similar that you'd never mistake them for anything except a mother and her son. Gazing at Corinne, Jeremy suddenly notices that resemblance, and he flinches.

"Hi," Corinne says shyly. She sweeps the bangs away from her forehead and gives him a halfhearted smile. She can't hug him. She can't kiss him. Not yet. All she can do is stand there.

Jeremy looks at her, then at Astrid, then at Dolores, and finally at Lucy. That's when Lucy pipes up. "That's your mom," she says as if this were the Ripley's Believe It or Not! museum.

Jeremy points at Astrid. "That's my mom."

"Well, we both are, sort of," Corinne says. "Don't you think?" She looks like a high school girl at a dance hoping that some eligible fellow will come into view to retrieve her.

"You're kidding," Jeremy says.

"Corinne is going to stay with us for a while until she gets back on her feet," I say.

That's when he turns to me, blushing from anger. "On her feet?" He starts to leave the room but then Corinne points at his ear.

"You have an earring," she says.

Jeremy nods, stumped by the obvious.

And then she says, "I've never gotten used to them on men. Not even on grown men. I know I should, the way everyone else does, but I can't. I just can't." She seems to be trying to break up the silences with plain speech. "No one told me how boy-pretty you'd become. I'm so old-fashioned. With that earring you look a little queer."

"Corinne!" my mother says, leaning against the kitchen counter for stability. "You can't say that. No one says that."

"Yes," she says shamefacedly. "No one does say anything like what I say. It's been my downfall."

"It's all right," Jeremy says. "Because I *am* queer. I'm, like, a *total* fag. And now this queer is going upstairs. Goodbye."

Off he goes, clumping noisily away from us. I'll let him sit up there for a minute before I go up to talk to him.

"Anyhow," Lucy says, "the word is 'gay.' You can't say 'queer' unless you *are* queer."

"They're the same, aren't they? Those words?" Corinne asks, trying to smile. I truly wish she would stop talking.

"Well, what's really interesting," Astrid says, suddenly turning around and facing us, "is why Jeremy would say that he's gay when all the evidence is to the contrary. And there's been *quite* a bit of evidence already, Corinne, though you wouldn't know that."

"No, I wouldn't know," Corinne responds.

"Tell her about Alissa," Lucy says to her mother. "Little Miss Princess? The pink stockings? The locket? The bunny factory?"

"No, we're not going into that," Astrid says.

"At least he didn't get her pregnant," I say helpfully, because he didn't. They used condoms.

"But he could of," Lucy says proudly. "If he had tried."

"This is so the wrong topic," Astrid says. "Corinne, you must be very tired. We're *all* surprised to see you, as no doubt you know, and I suppose you'd like a glass of water. Are you hungry? Thirsty? The salmon will be ready soon, and we'll all sit down to eat. I wish you had given us a bit of notice. And we'll have to catch up on all your news!" Astrid tries a smile.

"I don't have any news," Corinne says. "Well, I mean, it's all news, it's all news to me. What isn't news? This bright shiny kitchen is news! And Lucy: you certainly are the newest thing. I feel like someone in a Russian novel, to tell you the truth." She looks at all of us, one by one. "Oh, have pity on me," she says, and then she begins to cry, and all the women move toward her.

Once I'm upstairs, I knock on Jeremy's door. He doesn't say "Come in," but I go in anyway. I'll spare you the details of his room. He's lying on his bed with his eyes closed. His shoes are off, and his big feet are sticking up at the end of the bed in their white socks, and he has an arm flung across his face, covering his eyes. I am amazingly proud of my son. I love him so much, but I have to hide it.

"Jeremy," I say. "You'll have to come back down eventually."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because it's unfair. She's unfair. I mean, she's, like, crazy. And I... and I'm supposed to love her, or something? Because she was once my mother? Fuck that."

"I need to say something to you," I say. "I just can't think of what."

"Please, Dad. None of that wisdom shit, okay? I hate wisdom. I just fucking hate it."

"Okay," I say. "You're in luck. I don't have any."

"That's good. Can we talk about something else? No, I know: let's not talk."

So we don't talk for a minute or two. Then Jeremy says, "You know, this isn't so bad."

"What?"

"Oh, having your mother show up and act crazy. That's not so bad. I mean, you know how I'm studying world geography now?"

"Uh huh."

"And, like, the point of world geography is not where the countries *are*, but what people actually *do*, you know? I mean, take a country like, for example, Paraguay. You know where Paraguay is, right?"

I nod. But I actually *don't* know where it is. Near Bolivia?

"So," and here he sits up, "so, okay. Anyhow, Paraguay is like this nothing country in the middle of South America, and they don't even all speak Spanish there, but this weird Indian language like Sioux except it's South American, but the point is, when you look at conditions, it's not all happy days down there. Well, maybe it's happier *now*. But what our textbook said? Was that they had, you know, *torture* parties there. Once. Where torturers get drunk and turn the dial up to eleven. Like they did in Chile. And Argentina. People get their fingernails pulled out and electrodes and stuff. I read about it. I've *been* reading about it. Torture. Like in Cuba, and in Europe when it was medieval? And in Russia. They'd hook you up to an electric board and zap you. And your body would dance around on the electric table. *Total* pain. I mean, compared to torture, this is nothing." He lies back on his pillow. He closes his eyes. "My mother showing up and being crazy? That is *nothing*. That's not even *waterboarding*."

He gives me this lecture while staring at me with great bravery.

I go back downstairs, and the five of us have dinner. Jeremy doesn't join us. That night, lying in bed and looking up at the ceiling fan in the dark of our bedroom, Astrid and I agree that I will have to investigate halfway houses for Corinne, and I will have to get her to a shrink so her moods can be stabilized.

The next morning, Jeremy does not join us for breakfast, and when I look outside, his bicycle is gone. And then, somewhat to my surprise, Corinne reappears in the morning light uncomplaining, saying that she experienced a good sleep. What will my ex-wife do all day? My mother says that she will look after Corinne for now. Perhaps they will go for walks, and my mother will expound about Jesus and how He is coming again to gather us up. As for Jeremy, he can't be upset forever. Lucy gives me a goodbye-daddy kiss before she boards the school bus. She seems unaffected by recent events, but then Corinne is not her mother, and she probably wants life to get back to normal.

That afternoon around four o'clock, as I am writing up a repair order on a faulty water pump, Jeremy comes bicycling into the garage. He looks around and sniffs appreciatively. He surveys the containers of brake fluid shelved in the Parts Department. I don't want him to give me any shit in here in front of my co-workers, so I don't smile although I am glad to see him.

"Hey," I say.

"Hey," he replies. He takes off his helmet and shakes out his hair. He's impressive: you can see why girls love him.

I put down my ballpoint pen. We walk into the customers' lounge and sit down on two vinyl chairs in the corner, next to a table on which are scattered old issues of *Field & Stream* and *Cosmopolitan*. All the customers are gone, so we're there alone. Jeremy stares at me for a moment, as if it's my fault that I met Corinne in the first place and made love to her eighteen years ago, so that he was born.

"Dad, I'm fucked up," he says. "And it's really fucked up that she's here. I'm just saying."

"I know," I reply. "It's hard on all of us."

"Not as hard on you as it is on me. I didn't think I could go back home today."

"Where *else* could you go?"

"Somewhere," he says. "Friends." It's true: he has many friends he could stay with. "I could actually, like, move out." He waits. "But I'm not going to."

"What are you going to do?" I ask. I have neither wisdom nor advice for him. All I have is curiosity.

"So I went to school this morning? And I found Alissa. I mean, we're over, but we're still friends, sort of. And I'm like, 'My birth mom showed up, and she's fucking nuts, and also she said I looked gay,' and Alissa is like, 'Yeah, wow, but she's your mom and thinks you're cute and you're way *not* gay,' and I go, 'Who gives a shit?' and she's, 'You should,' and I say, 'But she's crazy,' and this is when Alissa sort of gets that lightbulb look and says, 'Well, the cool thing would be to put it all on your Tumblr. That'd be so great. 'Cause if your birth mom's so

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weird and interesting, everybody will want to read it. Like: 'Guess what, everybody, my mom showed up.'

Somehow I have the feeling this has become a huge business with his friends within the past few hours and that they all have opinions about what he should do.

"And?" I ask.

"That's what's weird," he says. "Like half of my friends already want to know if she's got a blog herself. Because they want to check it out, like right now."

"Maybe you could help her with a blog," I say, trying to mediate. "Maybe you could help her set one up."

"Yeah, I guess I can do that. But I have to hate her for a few more days." He sits there quietly. "I have to really hate her a few days. I know she's crazy. I get that. But I have to hate her for not being loyal to us." He used that word: *us*. As much as I love Astrid, she didn't use that word last night. It was all *you*: you have to do this or that.

So I tell Jeremy that he can hate Corinne for a while, and then he has to give it up.

The hatred lasts longer than we think it will. In the meantime we get Corinne to a psychiatrist, who puts her on lithium. There are no discernible effects at first.

Corinne tries to be inconspicuous down there in the basement and at dinnertime. I'll give her credit for that. It's hard for her, however, because right out of the blue at dinner she'll start talking about wildlife creatures, some of them imaginary, that no one has mentioned in conversation. Wolves and bears figure prominently in her thinking, and all the while Jeremy is seething over there at his place at the table. He stares at Corinne with distaste as he bolts down his food before he rushes upstairs and slams his bedroom door.

Three weeks later the atmosphere in the house begins to shift subtly, as if a low-pressure system had arrived after a long period of drought. One evening I am coming up the stairs and I see Jeremy and Corinne talking on the upstairs landing. Then, two days later, I see her in his

room, sitting at his desk in front of his computer, and Jeremy is standing behind her, quietly giving her advice. I know better than to ask them what's going on, so I knock on Lucy's door and go in there. Lucy hears everything that's going on in the house before anyone else does. It's true that she likes to preach, but she has the soul of a Soviet spy.

"Hi, Princess," I say. She's lying on the bed reading a Harry Potter book.

"Hi," she says.

"You okay?" I ask.

"Um, yeah." She has her head propped up by an arm under her chin. On her wall she has a poster of some ballet star up on her toes surrounded by other pink-tutu-clad ladies. Adhesive stars decorate Lucy's ceiling, and her lifelong doll, Eleanor, gazes at her with glassy plastic eyes from the bookshelf. Lucy continues to read while she talks to me.

"What's going on between Corinne and Jeremy? Do you know?"

"You should ask them."

"I can't," I say.

"So," she says, putting the huge novel aside and looking up at me, "he's helping her with *Runaway Mom*." She waits for my reaction, and when I don't say anything, she says, "He got tired of hating her. He decided she wasn't going to go away."

"What's *Runaway Mom*?"

"That's her blog," Lucy says, sitting up and stretching, "He's helping her with it. It's going to be real popular. All the kids at school want to read it."

"What? Why?"

"Daddy, didn't you ever want to run away?"

"No," I say. "I don't think I ever did."

"That's weird," she says.

"Everyone else does."

Corinne lives across town now, in a little one-bedroom apartment. My mother goes over there on Friday and takes her to Bible class. Corinne gets disability payments from the government, although we worry that those funds will soon be cut off. She comes over here once or twice a week for lunch or dinner. Everyone is mostly getting used to her and her ways, but Astrid has taken up smoking cigarettes (though not my brand)

on the front lawn after dinner, a bold move for a woman in midlife.

One time I went to Corinne's blog. Just one time. I opened up *Runaway Mom*, and I read what Corinne had written there a day or two before.

How many chapters does life have? It has many chapters, and you'll notice that when the passenger train you're on is headed in the wrong direction, it's often moving so fast that you can't get off it without hurting yourself. I threw myself off the particular train I was on and was seriously injured for years. I wish I knew what God wanted from us. I don't think He wants anything from me anymore, but I think He once did, and He said so. Sometimes you run away to leave something behind, and sometimes you run away to get somewhere. I did both. At least I didn't kill myself. At least I didn't murder anyone.

That was all I wanted to read of her blog. I went out to the garage and opened a beer and smoked a few cigarettes out there in silence. I was thinking.

One time when I was a boy I took my sled out to one of the city parks. This was the day after a huge snowfall, many inches, but the sledding hill was packed down by the time I got there, and quite a few kids had their boards and saucers and sleds, and they were all screaming happily. I climbed up that hill and flew down on my sled, and after about thirty minutes I was screaming happily too. I was out there so long I got frostbite on the tips of my toes, and when I came home my mother put me into the bathtub with lukewarm water. I was so happy, I didn't care about the frostbite, and it didn't hurt too much. It just burned. And I didn't think I would remember that day—you don't really think you're going to remember those times when you're happy—but I did. It's funny, the staying power of happiness. I finish my cigarette and put out the stub in the empty beer can.

I can hear Astrid calling to me out the back door. "Wes?" she says. "Wes? Where are you?"

"Out here," I yell from the garage.

"Come in, honey," she calls to me. "It's supertime."

So I get up from the floor and go into the house where they are all waiting for me. ■

NEW BOOKS

By Jane Smiley

In 1929, Robert Ripley was receiving nearly 3,000 letters a day. As Neal Thompson writes in *A CURIOUS MAN: THE STRANGE & BRILLIANT LIFE OF ROBERT "BELIEVE IT OR NOT!" RIPLEY* (Crown Archetype, \$26, crownpublishing.com), one fan sent

an envelope with a drawing of a bird in place of an address. It took a magnifying glass to reveal the words "Robert Ripley" repeated thousands of times in the shape of the bird. Others sent letters addressed in Confederate Army code, in Boy Scout semaphore, or simply addressed to "the damndest liar in the world."

Even without proper addresses, the post office knew to deliver Ripley's mail to the New York Athletic Club, where the cartoonist kept a small apartment and avidly played handball. Thompson's spirited but uneven biography charts Ripley's rise as a popular phenomenon, a deeply idiosyncratic personality who—through newspapers, radio, film, and, at the very end, television—wedded his restless obsessions to the rise of mass culture. Thompson tries to

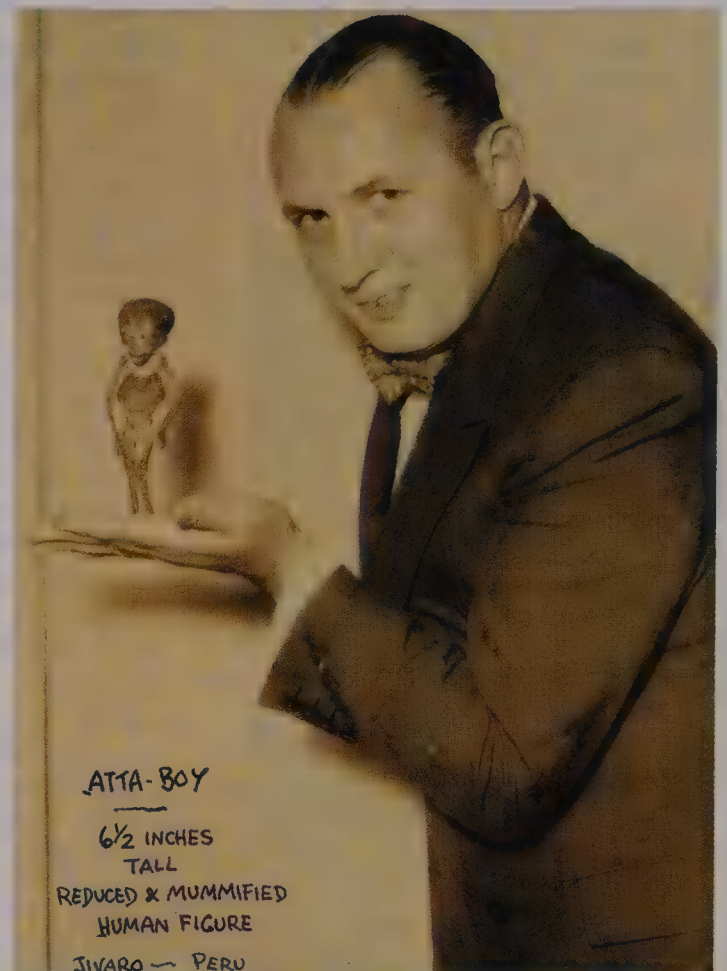
make the case that Ripley was a pop-culture game changer, and though his argument is never quite persuasive, his portrait of the man behind the franchise is.

Born in Santa Rosa, California, in 1890, Ripley grew up in a volatile and impoverished family. He was profoundly shy, a trait exacerbated by a famished physique, buckteeth, and a stutter. In 1905, when he was fifteen, his father died; seven months later, the 1906 earthquake destroyed most of Santa Rosa. But Ripley was just the sort of talented, appealing boy to be taken on by a kindly mentor—his English teacher let him turn in drawings about assigned readings rather than reports and soon got into the habit of hanging these drawings above the blackboard. At the end of high school, Ripley launched himself onto the tip of the business that was altering newspapers: comics.

Ripley was awkward but enterpris-

ing. At eighteen he sold his first comic to *Life* magazine; at nineteen he moved to San Francisco, where he haunted Chinatown, in part out of fascination with the exotic world he found there, but also, as he later said, because "when I was hungry, they fed me." He went to work for the *Chronicle*, most often illustrating high-profile sports contests, and in 1912 he moved to New York City. "Ripley's Believe It or Not!" began as a drawing for the *New York Globe* called "Champs and Chumps," which debuted in December 1918 and consisted of nine depictions of oddball athletic feats, including one of a man who had walked backward across America.

In 1919, Ripley married a young woman who worked in the Ziegfeld Follies, though the relationship quickly broke down. According to Thompson, the phenomena portrayed in Ripley's cartoons in these years shifted from sports (a billiards player sinking 23,000 balls) to "a sketch



Top: Robert Ripley with a mummified fetus known as Atta-Boy, which was featured on the cover of his second book. Bottom: Details of pages from *Believe It or Not*. All images courtesy Ripley Entertainment Inc.

of a man who never shaved, a man who ate glass and nails, a man who crossed the English Channel on a mattress, a man who stood on one leg for twelve hours." At the end of 1922, Ripley literally took off, sent by the *Globe* on "Ripley's Ramble 'Round the World."



He posted months of dispatches from Hawaii, Singapore, China, India, Jerusalem, Italy. Apart from his talent for drawing, Ripley was a regular guy, and his work was filled with the sort of naïve, gawking prejudice that his fans shared: he found Benares, where he saw cremation ghats, fakirs, and corpses floating in the Ganges, more interesting than Paris because more extreme things happened there. He went to Rome but preferred Pompeii because it was "the deadest town I was ever in—and I am not excluding Philadelphia." When, in 1936, the Boys Club of New York surveyed thousands of boys about who had the best job in America, Ripley topped Henry Ford, James Cagney, and J. Edgar Hoover. "He gets 'round a lot," said one of the interviewees.

Henry Ford, the subject of Richard Snow's *I INVENTED THE MODERN AGE: THE RISE OF HENRY FORD* (Scribner, \$30, simonandschuster.com), might have been surprised to find himself less popular than Ripley, since at one time half the cars in America were Fords. (As John Steinbeck wrote in *Cannery Row*, "two generations of

Americans knew more about the Ford coil than the clitoris, about the planetary system of gears than the solar system of stars.") But Ford shared Ripley's compulsion to collect. By 1936, he had mostly abandoned the car business in order to devote more time to his "vest-pocket village" in Dearborn, Michigan, which he had rigged with gas lamps, horse-drawn buggies, and a windmill transplanted from Cape Cod. Ford frequently claimed that "history is more or less bunk." It is "being rewritten every year from a new point of view," he argued, "so how can anybody claim to know the truth about history?" He preferred to spend his money preserving history's leavings, including the \$10 million worth of steam engines he amassed to illustrate the progress of the machine. Snow writes,

Ford could see any mechanism with an intimate understanding that verged on the uncanny. He could look at a dozen identical carburetors spread out on a workbench and point to the one that wasn't working properly. He could handle a valve or a rifle breech and know "what the man who made them was thinking."

To Ford, a collection of steam engines was more illuminating than a collection of history books.

Born three weeks after the Battle of Gettysburg, Ford was a controversial and peculiar character, a teetotaling pacifist conservative anti-Semite who believed in reincarnation and women's suffrage, who ran ads for the Model T "showing female drivers rolling joyfully through the countryside," a man who in 1915 chartered a steamer to rally the neutral countries of Europe to end World War I. He remembered his McGuffey Readers, which promoted ideas of free enterprise and



self-reliance, with affection, but also upended the relationship between business owners and their workers. As one commentator wrote in 1959, "He took the worker out of the class of the 'wage-earning proletariat' to which Ricardo and Marx had relegated him and ... made every worker a potential customer." Ford's famous five dollars a day (paid to "any man 22 years old and upwards") translates to almost twice the federal minimum wage of 2012. And in Ford's factory, it was paid to black workers and immigrants from Poland, Russia, and the Middle East. He was impossible to photograph—the reporter Barnet Hershey remarked that when "one side of Ford's face is covered, a benign, gently humorous expression dominates. When the other side is covered, the look is transformed into one of deadly, malevolent calculation."

Snow, more than Thompson, gets to the meat of a biographer's task—demonstrating how psychology and circumstances blend to create a life. Snow portrays Ford as softer than the curmudgeon he came to seem after many public battles with his employees, his son, his financiers, and the rivals he openly disdained. At least eight biographies of Ford have been written, including Allan Nevins's three-volume collaboration with Frank Ernest Hill, published between 1954 and 1963; Snow's supple and informative effort reminds us that although we've bought the automobiles and the assembly line, we continue to wrestle with the issues that concerned their creator: the concentration of wealth, the representation of women, the fate of our immigrants, the threat of war.

The man who actually invented the modern age, at least as baby boomers know it, was, in 1936, not an entrepreneur but a thirty-two-year-old physicist from New York's Upper West Side with a deep interest in cosmic rays. According to Ray Monk in his new biography, *ROBERT OPPENHEIMER: A LIFE INSIDE THE CENTER* (Doubleday, \$37.50, randomhouse.com), J. Robert Oppenheimer was happy in his work for much of his life. But if one side of the cover photo of Oppie's face is hidden

Top: Ripley and a customs agent with masks collected during Ripley's travels in South and Central America. Courtesy Ripley Entertainment Inc.
Bottom: Henry Ford on his Quadricycle, June 1896 © The Art Archive



we see sadness, and if the other side is hidden we see profound reserve. The photo was taken in the 1950s—after the detonation of his atom bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, after the hearings that implicated him as a fellow traveler and stripped him of his security clearance—and so both are understandable.

Several biographies of Oppenheimer have been written in the decades since his death (including *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, by Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 2006), so we have to wonder whether another is necessary—but Monk, who is a professor of philosophy at the University of Southampton, and who has written about Ludwig Wittgenstein and Bertrand Russell, excels at explaining not only the scientific and ethical thought that so fascinated his subject but also the relationships that bedeviled him throughout his life. At the 1945 Trinity test, the first detonation of a nuclear weapon, Oppenheimer quoted the Bhagavad Gita: “Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.” That, according to Monk, he actually *misquoted* his source (translating the Sanskrit word for “time” as “death”) perhaps provides an insight into his own take on a life that had, until then, outwardly appeared extraordinarily successful. He once said, “My life as a child did not prepare me in any way for the fact that there are cruel and bitter things.” Friends called him “an intellectual snob, a mental exhibitionist” who could be a “pest”; he once wrote that he needed physics more than he needed friends. In the summer

of 1963, he said that “up to now, and even more in the days of my almost infinitely prolonged adolescence, I hardly took any action . . . that did not arouse in me a very great sense of revulsion and of wrong.”

Monk’s chapters on the testing of the bomb and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are remarkably powerful, showing (in part because of an accident at Los Alamos that killed one of the younger scientists) how taken aback the Manhattan Project scientists were at the fruit of their labor. Most had believed, because of prewar collaborations with European physicists, that they were in a race with the Nazis to develop the ultimate weapon. But by May 1945, two months before Trinity, the Nazis had surrendered. Many advocated a test demonstration of the weapon for the Japanese to persuade them to end the war. The Army—and Truman—disagreed, and the scientists learned within weeks, after the gratuitous bombing of Nagasaki, that though they had built the first nuclear weapon, they had no say in its deployment. This lesson was reinforced for Oppenheimer when he met with Truman and pointed out that, since making the bomb was simple enough that it could not be kept secret from the Soviets, more open methods of arms control were necessary. Truman called him a “cry-baby scientist.”

That Oppenheimer later voiced doubts about the development of the hydrogen bomb motivated the very painful examination of his personal life that resulted, in 1954, in the withdrawal of his security clearance, the collapse of his career, and public humiliation. From 1954 until his death, from cancer (he was a heavy smoker), in 1967, Oppenheimer gave talks around the world arguing not only that scientists should share their findings but also that scientists and governments should discuss—and prevent—the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

If the modern era was one in which men became as gods, then Oppenheimer got a taste of one divine attribute—omniscience—just as Ripley did of omnipresence, Ford of omnipotence. What remains to be seen is whether we can manage the gifts that these titans bestowed on us. ■

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MAKING A SCENE

Willa Cather's correspondence

By Christine Smallwood

Discussed in this essay:

The Selected Letters of Willa Cather, edited by Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout.
Knopf. 720 pages. \$37.50. knopfdoubleday.com.

From an early age Willa Cather had a talent for making a scene. When an elderly judge dropped in at the family farm in Virginia and dared to address her in the cutesy tones he thought suitable for little girls, she corrected him straight away: "I'se a dang'ous nigger, I is!" In her teenage years she cut her hair short, took to wearing boys' clothes, and began calling herself William Cather Jr., sometimes promoting herself to the more august William Cather, M.D. Christened Wilella at birth, she gave herself the nickname Willa, though later in life it didn't satisfy. The creator of *Ántonia*, *Thea*, and *Sapphira* confessed to a fan in 1936 that "if I had known, when I first began to write, that my name would be printed about a good deal, I would certainly have changed it to Mary or Jane, or Janet."

Willa was always in a hurry to grow up. As a child and adolescent in Red Cloud, Nebraska, a town about a hundred miles west of Lincoln, she formed her closest relationships with cultivated adults—the music teacher, the doctors, the local shop clerk who taught her Latin and liked to tinker in his home laboratory. Her earliest surviving letter, which she wrote at the age of fourteen, explains to an adult neighbor why she preferred

Christine Smallwood's last article for Harper's Magazine, "Mental Weather," appeared in the November 2012 issue.



the lab to the classroom. "Here I am 'Miss Cather' & govern, there I am a child & am governed," she wrote. "That makes a great difference with frail humanity."

"Frailty" was a complicated notion for the author of *My Ántonia*, *Song of*

the Lark, and *The Professor's House*, novels about tough pioneer women, ferociously single-minded artists, and rugged railwaymen and adventurers. For it's not the individual Cather recognizes as frail—it's humanity itself. Late in life, she recollected her family's 1883 move from Virginia to the Nebraska Territory. The wagon rolled over an endless blank landscape, and she felt something like an "erasure of personality." At the homestead, her grandmother's steel-tipped hickory cane, used for stabbing rattlesnakes,

caught her eye. "She had killed a good many snakes with it, and that seemed to argue that life might not be so flat as it looked there." From one point of view humanity is frail, even erasable. But like a pencil, a good sharp stick is enough to drum up a little interest.

While an undergraduate at the University of Nebraska, Cather became the drama critic for the *Nebraska State Journal*. As the *Journal's* managing editor remembered it, she had a reputation for "biting frankness." When a production starring Lillian Lewis came to town in 1895, she asked, "and how was it with the rural, robust queen, the royal Kleopawtra? Miss Lewis walks like a milkmaid and moves like a housemaid." Nor did Cather reserve her ire for the actors. The *New York World*, she complained in October 1894, "possesses two of the best dramatic critics in the country, but it also possesses a young woman who needs the worst kind of boycotting." And lest the audience think itself safe ... "The most obnoxious person at the theatre, after the woman with the crying baby, is the man who wants his

neighbors to understand that he appreciates the play."

It was backstage in a Pittsburgh theater, in Lizzie Hudson Collier's dressing room, that Cather met her first great love, Isabelle McClung, daughter of a prominent local family

and a supporter of the arts. The nature of Cather's relationships with Isabelle and her second love, Edith Lewis, has caused scholars and critics a great deal of worry. First they gave us a prudish, spinsterish Cather; then an out-and-proud Cather. Now it's thought that Cather was a woman who exclusively enjoyed the intimate company of other women, though she probably would not have recognized her sexuality as lesbian in the modern sense. Readers will not find it terribly useful to imagine her as a "closeted" person looking to be liberated. Cather's biographers are not sure that she ever had sex, and despite her close friendship with the flaming dandy Stephen Tennant—one of Siegfried Sassoon's lovers—she disapproved of Oscar Wilde's "infamy." She had few kind words for other female writers. Erotic life is seldom simple.

Cather worked as an editor in Pittsburgh and then as a high school English teacher, publishing stories and poetry, and in the spring of 1901 she moved into the McClung family home. Willa and Isabelle traveled together to France and England and seem to have been very happy together until the muckraking editor S. S. McClure, a fan of Cather's fiction, asked her to come to New York to take a position at McClure's magazine. She moved east in 1906, leaving Isabelle behind in Pittsburgh, and quickly worked her way up to managing editor. She began by renting a room in the house of her friend Edith Lewis—the two had met in Lincoln back in 1903—and they lived together until Cather's death. Edith was the classic literary wife. She even got a job as a proofreader at McClure's, where she worked on all of Cather's copy.

In 1916 Isabelle married the violinist Jan Hambourg, an event Cather found devastating. "Isabelle has married a very brilliant and perfectly poisonous Jew," she wrote to her brother Roscoe. "Not one of her old Pittsburgh friends can endure him. Nice situation for me." She eventually accepted Jan and visited and traveled with the Hambourgs many times, both with Edith and without. Throughout her life she wrote frequently and lovingly, and somewhat

longingly, of Isabelle, who was one of the first to take Cather seriously as a fiction writer. (When she lived with the McClungs, they gave her a special writing room.) She took a leave from McClure's in 1911 to finish her first novel, and never returned to the office.

More formative than the writing of that novel, *Alexander's Bridge*—which Cather later dismissed as "very shallow"—was the trip she took while on leave to Santa Fe, where her brother Douglass was living. "Those weeks off in the desert with my big handsome brother—six feet four, he is—and his wild pals, are weeks that I shall never forget," she explained to McClure.

They took all the kinks and crumples out. I feel as if my mind had been freshly washed and ironed, and were ready for a new life. I feel, somehow, confident; feel as if I had got my second wind and would never torture my self about little things (like the ART DEPARTMENT!) again.

As a priest says in Cather's late novel *Shadows on the Rock*, "No man can give himself heart and soul to one thing while in the back of his mind he cherishes a desire, a secret hope, for something very different."

Cather has often been praised for restraint, even as her novels meander, sometimes formlessly, toward sudden emotional cliffs. Her sense of irony is modern and almost amoral. (She agreed with Rebecca West's assessment that "[D. H.] Lawrence is the Puritan reformer, for all he's habitually indecent, and I am the Pagan, for all I'm stupidly decent!") Cather treats the terrors of adulthood—regret, separation, the price of ambition, compromise—as well as its consoling friendships unsensationally and plainly. She is one of the many canonical American authors who ought never to be assigned to high school students—they will only think she is boring, and they will be right, insofar as to an adolescent the perspective of middle age is and ought to be a dull one. Even as a young woman Cather wrote looking into the rear-view mirror. She wanted to grow up fast, and she did.

Until now, researchers have been permitted to read the archive of her correspondence but have not been allowed to quote it, resulting in scholarly wars of paraphrase as heated as they are absurd. Edited by Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout, *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather* is therefore a major event—though not one that reveals the author to have been among the wittiest or most entertaining correspondents in the American tradition. All but four pieces of correspondence she wrote to Isabelle and Edith were destroyed. The other 716 pages are replete with updates on her whereabouts, writing progress, and health issues. On the occasions when Cather divulges a negative opinion or a smidge of gossip, she urges her correspondent to a level of secrecy more often associated with state subterfuge. The steamiest moment is a blink-and-you'll-miss-it reference to fun times with her college crush Louise Pound: "I am pretty well now," she writes to a friend,

save for sundry bruises received in driving a certain fair maid over the country with one hand, sometimes, indeed, with no hand at all. But she did not seem to mind my method of driving, even when we went off banks and over hay stacks, and as for me—I drive with one hand all night in my sleep.

She added, "You can read all of this letter to Ned and Frances except the last part, as I dont [sic] wish to corrupt them by spooniness."

But it's not Cather's spooniness that could corrupt a modern reader—it's her personality. Her letters are pushy, annoying, affectionate, overbearing, frankly immodest, and falsely modest. They brim with wide-eyed gosh-me self-promotion, health complaints, the occasional paranoid insight (for color), and insults (for the recipient's own good). The playwright and poet Zoë Akins comes in for the worst of it. "If I told you I liked [your new book of poems] as much as I like your first book of verse written long ago, you'd know I was lying. For you yourself know it's not so good." Having gotten the poetry out of the way, she tells Zoë not to "play into [the] hands" of the New York reviewers

who have it in for her by publishing any kind of credo or manifesto. And forget about waiting to be defended by her powerful friend.

If one is consistently silent where one's own self is concerned, one must be silent when one's friends are attacked. They reflect one's point of view, one's admirations—to speak for them is, in a manner, to speak for one's self.

Akins's response? She sent flowers.

Well into her thirties Cather was exuberant, tripping over her own heels with crushes—on opera singers, actresses, and the handsome Mexican guide named Julio she met on her first trip to the Southwest. She also played the *grande dame* of a circle of fans and protégés, including the grateful Akins, the journalist Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, Tennant, and, of course, accommodating Edith herself. Cather and Edith traveled to the Southwest and Paris, among other places, but Edith was never invited to the family home in Red Cloud.

Greatness never precluded self-pity. “I shall always be sorry that I went home last summer,” Cather wrote to her brother Douglass in 1916,

because I seemed to get in wrong at every turn. It seems not to be anything that I do, in particular, but my personality in general, what I am and think and like and dislike, that you all find exasperating after a little while. I'm not so well pleased with myself, my dear boy, as you sometimes seem to think. Only in my business one has to advertise a little or drop out—I surely do not advertise or talk about myself as much as most people who write for a living ... I can't see how it would help any of my family any if I lay down on my oars and quit that rough-and-tumble game.

She goes on, promising not to “sit around and weep” if Douglass is “grouchy”; she vows selflessly, “I won't expect too much.” She insists that she's changed for the better: “I've grown a good deal milder in the last year ... Three friends died during the winter ... perhaps the disapproval I got at home last summer has been

good for me. I am quite a meek proposition now, I can tell you.” At the end she twists the knife: “I only hope I'm not so spiritless I won't be able to make a living.”

Keep in mind that Douglass was, along with Roscoe, one of her favorite siblings. (Willa was the eldest of seven, but these three were closest in age and shared the attic bedroom when they were children.) If you think things with Douglass were difficult, consider what it was like with her little sister Elsie. In 1945 Cather confided to Roscoe's widow: “An old friend of mine who lives in Lincoln wrote me ‘why does Elsie let her jealousy of you spoil her life? It has become an obsession with her, and embarrasses her friends.’”

Though Cather's work was initially well received by critics, she became increasingly press-shy, wounded by the likes of Lionel Trilling and Edmund Wilson. Her fiction was not on the vanguard of the left; it ignored urban-industrial masses; it was not obviously experimental; it was unfashionable. And then there was the other reason to want privacy. Take an episode from 1924, when the newspaper in Red Cloud was full of rumors that the Cather family was hiding a local woman, Marjorie Anderson, who was afraid that her husband, who had abandoned her, would return. Cather told her mother that

all that newspaper publicity about Margie was harder on me than on any of the rest of you, and it was needless. If you hadn't been so foolish about never letting anyone see her, there would have been no “mystery.” But that is past and gone. I wasn't angry about it. I thought you had been unwise, and the result of your mistaken judgment made a good deal of ugly talk about me.

In their introduction, Jewell and Stout argue that Cather's clear wish never to publish her letters had to do not with a principle of privacy or a need for secrecy but with “her desire to shape her own public identity.” If Willa or Edith had *really* tried to destroy the record, they write, “would so many letters have survived?” Such

logic is self-serving. A savvy Cather who wants to be in control of her “brand” is a Cather we can know. A Cather who might fear exposure is more distant to us, and an ambivalent Cather, who wants to have her privacy but doesn't go so far as to torch everything in her wake, is inconveniently inconsistent.

They are right that Cather liked steering her publishing machine. She was good at it. She was trained as an editor, after all, and always retained an editorial sensibility. She had definite ideas about jacket copy and typefaces. She dealt with art departments and publicity departments. She lived with a woman who had worked her way up from proofreader to assistant managing editor to professional advertising copywriter, and she knew a thing or two about what sold. “I am not wholly happy about the cover [of *The Song of the Lark*],” she wrote passive-aggressively to Ferris Greenslet, her publisher at Houghton Mifflin, “but I shan't be stubborn about it. You've never given me a cover I've liked. I've only borne them patiently.” Two years later she dropped the act: “Do let me know when you come to New York. I want very much to talk to you about the physical make-up of the next book. I want to try something a trifle new in color of the binding and jacket.” She did try something new: she published it with Alfred A. Knopf, with whom she had a close and amiable relationship for the rest of her career.

Cather had the feminine talent for a sideways attack. “I am very stupid in business matters,” she wrote insincerely, or diplomatically, in a letter informing her English publishers that she had switched houses. When she had a complaint for Greenslet about the Riverside Press edition of *My Ántonia*, she didn't mention it until the postscript. “This seems a foolish personal request to make when I really care so little about personal things just now,” she wrote (in reference to the war). But:

I was shocked to find on what poor, thin paper the book is now printed. The trouble is that since the letters on page 5 show through the paper and cloud the text on page 6, the book is now very hard to read.

Cather had plenty of readers to worry about. Her books, even her short-story collections, were bestsellers, and in 1931 she had been featured on the cover of *Time* magazine.

Being an audience brought her pleasures as profound as having an audience. As she wrote to Elsie Sergeant of her trip to Maine with the opera singer Olive Fremstad, a source (along with Cather herself) for the singer in *The Song of the Lark*:

While I was in Fremstad's camp we did things every mortal minute except when we were asleep, and even then I dreamed hard. She fished as if she had no other means of getting food; cleaned all the fish, swam like a walrus, rowed, tramped, cooked, watered her garden. I was not much more than an audience—very little help, but it was the grandest show of human vigor and grace I've ever watched. I feel as if I'd lived for a long while with the wife of the Dying Gladiator in her husky prime, in deep German forests.

She described Sigrid Undset, the Norwegian Nobel Laureate in Literature, as

just all a great woman should be—and on a giant scale. She is a wonderful cook, a proficient scholar and has the literature of four languages at her fingers [*sic*] ends. There is nothing about wild flowers and garden flowers that she doesn't know, and she is able to make plants thrive and bloom in her very humble and gloomy little hotel rooms.... She combines in herself the nature of an artist, a peasant, and a scholar. She is cut on a larger pattern than any woman I have ever known, and it rests me just to sit and look at the strength that stood unshaken through so much. Of course, of her son's murder in a German concentration camp, she never speaks.

Do not read that "of course" as a "but"—silence, whether tactful or traumatized, is part of Undset's greatness in Cather's eyes. It is typical of Cather that not speaking the major story of one's life would be a sign of strength. She was always faithful to the credo of "the thing unnamed," which she laid out in her essay "The Novel Demeuble":

Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there—that, one might say, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself.

She mentioned something similar to F. Scott Fitzgerald, who feared Cather would think he had stolen aspects of her novel *A Lost Lady* in his portrait of Daisy Buchanan. "I suppose everybody who has ever been swept away by personal charm tries in some way to express his wonder that the effect is so much greater than the cause," she assured him. "After all, the only thing one can tell about beauty, is just how hard one was hit by it."

In Cather's thing unnamed, modernism and Mallarmé meet the strong, silent American type. With reason, it has become an *idée fixe* in the criticism on Cather, used to justify reading her work for queer themes and again not reading her work for queer themes. What's important about the unnameable or the enigmatic is not that it separates Cather from the world but that it brings her closer to the world and to other people. "One can never tell the why of particular affinities," she wrote to Roscoe. Why was Isabelle an object of beauty and desire? Why Edith? Why Olive? Cather's fiction is unrelentingly scathing on the subjects of social obligations and norms, including marriage, praising instead "the double life" or "secret self." But this secret self always comes out through original contact with another self; when left alone, as in *The Professor's House*, it becomes nihilistic, suicidal. Her best novel, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, contains hangings, near-starvation, Indian wars, blizzards, and the gold rush, but Cather uses the word "adventure" to describe something at once far quieter and more consequential: the moment the two priests first meet as children. "There was something about the baker's son that had given their meeting the colour of an adventure."



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Cather measures lifetimes by intensity of feeling; the things that matter may last only a few weeks, or a summer. A certain amount of solitude, though, is necessary to intimacy. As Father Hector puts it in *Shadows on the Rock*, "Only solitary men know the full joys of friendship. Others have their family; but to a solitary and an exile his friends are everything"—they provide "the feeling of being with one's own kind." This is why the friendships in her novels so often occur between musicians, who are bound by their pursuit of beauty, or between priests. (Cather was not a Catholic, and had a Catholic friend check her manuscripts to make sure she had the details right.) As she matured, she was increasingly drawn to characters who also forgo conventional attachments, who are entirely devoted to their vocation, and whose work provides sufficient compensation for whatever loneliness or isolation they endure. "To fulfill the dreams of one's youth," one bishop says to the other in *Death Comes*, "is the best that can happen to a man."

Cather is a pastoral writer, but her Arcadia is not a place; it's a moment, guarded by the people who lived it with her. "We brought each other up," Cather wrote of Isabelle after the catastrophe of her death. "One can never form such a friendship twice. One does not want to. As long as she lived, her youth and mine were realities to both of us." This is why partings, breakups, estrangements, and death are so difficult to bear. "Things happen to our friendships; that's the worst about living," the singer Sebastian says to his beloved student in the novel *Lucy Gayheart*. "Young people can't know what it means." To lose a friend is always to lose part of oneself.

Cather was an aesthete who did not surround herself in luxury. She did not need a lot, but she liked for things to be of high quality; she liked them to be useful, and to last, and be kept well. This is a persistent theme in her novels: Bishop Latour "had a very special way of handling objects that were sacred [and] extended that manner to things

which he considered beautiful." As a seventeenth-century French colonist thinks in *Shadows on the Rock*,

These coppers, big and little, these brooms and clouts and brushes, were tools; and with them one made, not shoes or cabinet-work, but life itself. One made a climate within a climate; one made the days—the complexion, the special flavour, the special happiness of each day as it passed; one made life.

Things, like friends, are the keepers of what used to be. This is just what her old crush Julio, the Mexican guide, didn't understand about Cather's passion for the lost Pueblo towns. "Cliff Dwellers bore him awfully," she confided to Elsie Sergeant. "'Why,' he says raising his brows, 'do you care for Los Muertos? We are living.'"

In 1927, a new subway line exiled Cather and Lewis from their home on Bank Street; they kept an address at the Grosvenor Hotel for five years, until they found a place on Park Avenue. Cather liked to write in New Hampshire and traveled in Canada, France, and California. Still, she enjoyed coming home. "I remember the pleasure Willa Cather got from being reunited with all the rather humble things buried so long in storage vaults, and also in getting a few new furnishings for the new apartment," Edith wrote in her memoir of their life together. As for Willa, she celebrated the publication of *The Professor's House*—a novel in which the masculine scholar Godfrey St. Peter excoriates the shallow materialism of his daughter, and whose climax comes when he finally abandons the hope of having anything to live for at all—by purchasing a fur coat. "Professor St. Peter has just gone and bought me a grand mink coat!" she gushed to her friend Irene. "Isn't he extravagant?" She intended to take good care of this coat. She asked Irene's husband, an insurance agent, to come round at the end of the week. "I'm afraid I'll lose it just because it's the first 'valuable' I've ever had."

"I am afraid that I have a rather bad reputation in my family," the sixty-seven-year-old Cather wrote to Roscoe, "a reputation for

howling about my ills." Not that there weren't things to howl about. She was hospitalized for a month for blood poisoning she got from a hat-pin scratch. She spent three weeks in the hospital for a sore throat that never turned all the way to quinsy. In 1940, three days autographing 500 books left her with an inflamed tendon in the thumb, from which she never quite recovered. It caused another three weeks in the hospital, and she eventually had to wear a large metal glove that reached up to her elbow. For the last years of her life, writing longhand was very painful. Since she couldn't compose her fiction by dictation, the doctors advised her never to write her own letters or even sign her name, and to preserve all her strength for her manuscripts.

Then her gallbladder and appendix had to be removed.

I weighed one hundred and twenty-six pounds when I went into the hospital and I came out weighing a little under one hundred and ten. For most of the month of August and all of September, I was lying in bed, in the apartment, too ill to move, and the heat was outrageous. To make matters worse, it rained every day.

For the archbishop, death is the great culmination, in which every image returns and one sees everything and everyone that has been: "There was no longer any perspective in his memories . . . he sat in the middle of his own consciousness." But where imagination runs ahead, inside the eye of eternity, letters run out. Cather died, quickly, of a cerebral hemorrhage, at home in April 1947. The collection ends with a new voice. The last letter is from niece Virginia to her mother Meta, Roscoe's widow, and it's more mundane than magisterial. Edith had upset Elsie by choosing a Unitarian minister for the funeral. "However she felt better when she saw that he wore a very rich & elaborate vestment. She thought they were against such trappings." There is high Victorian comedy in this scene. Cather, who always loved Thackeray, would have liked reading it. ■

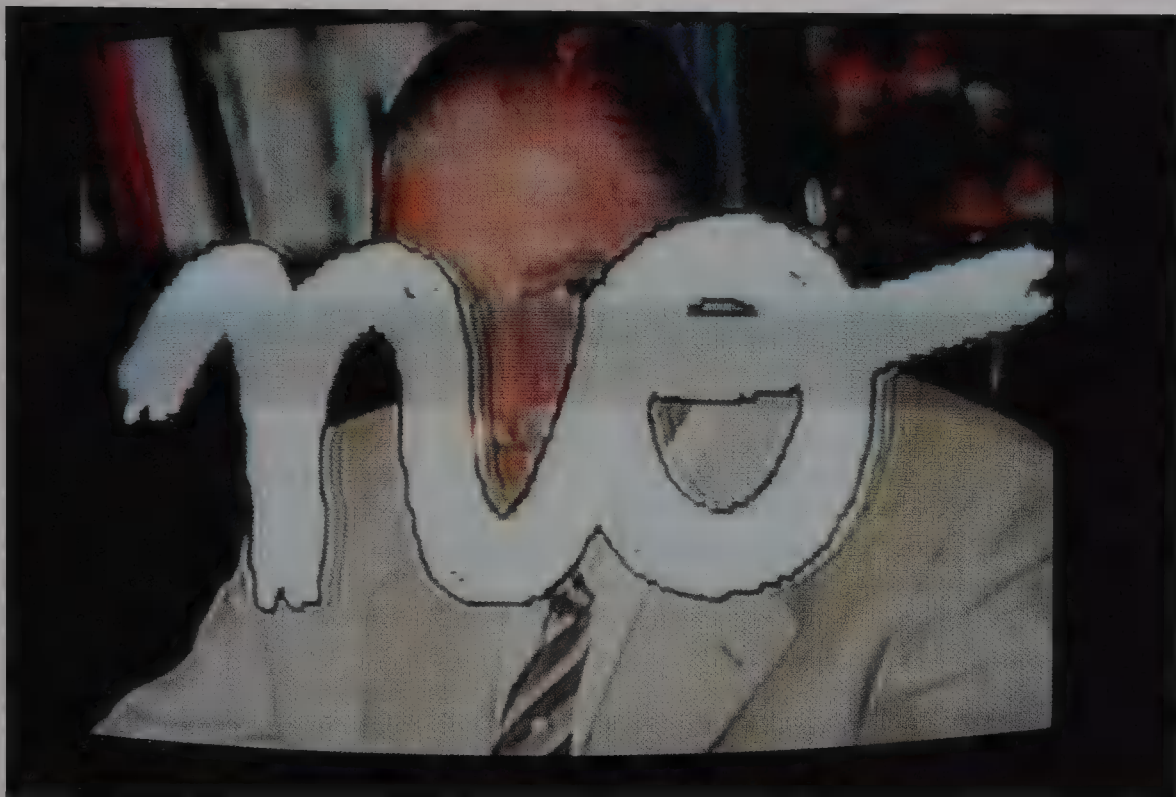
OPEN HAPPINESS

No and the magic system of advertising

By J. Hoberman

Discussed in this essay:

No, directed by Pablo Larraín. Fabula/Participant Media/Canana. 118 minutes.
sonyclassics.com/no.



Do movies have the power to change history? Or, more specifically, can TV ads alter the course of an election? The affirmative answer is provided by Chilean filmmaker Pablo Larraín's fact-based fourth feature, wittily titled *No*.

The thirty-six-year-old Larraín has devoted his career to excavating Chile's recent past, especially the 1973 overthrow of Salvador Allende and the brutal military regime established by General Augusto Pinochet. Documentary, however, is not Larraín's mode. His two previous movies, *Tony Manero* (2008) and *Post Mortem* (2010)—the former concerned with life under the Pinochet dictatorship, the latter with

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its origins—are, though shot in a naturalistic style, dark, absurdist allegories. Populated by characters who suggest hungry ghosts and animated corpses, they exemplify what might be termed the political gothic.

To the degree that Chilean cinema has an international reputation, it is best known for its exiles—Miguel Littín, Patricio Guzmán, the late Raúl Ruiz and his wife, Valeria Sarmiento—all of whom left the country following the 1973 coup. Larraín represents a new generation: he is a child of the dictatorship, born three years after Allende's ouster to a wealthy, powerful, and politically prominent family. His father, Hernán Larraín, is a senator, and his mother, Magdalena Matte, served as Chile's housing minister from 2010 to 2011. No stranger to the marketplace, Larraín has produced television com-

mercials and codirected an action-drama series on cocaine cartels for HBO Latin America, but thus far his overriding interest has been what we might call his birthright.

Given the charnel-house atmosphere of *Tony Manero* and *Post Mortem*, it's striking that Larraín concludes his Pinochet trilogy on a note of near-giddy optimism. Although sunnier than the first two installments—it depicts the peaceful dismantling of the Pinochet regime by a 1988 plebiscite—*No*, like

Larraín's earlier films, has its supernatural aspect. Larraín's subject is what the British cultural critic Raymond Williams once called the "magic system" of advertising. *No* is a feel-good movie that enacts, even as it satirizes, the sorcery that makes us feel good. There hasn't been a more positive argument for advertising as a mass mood-altering drug since Don Draper pitched the Kodak Carousel as a personal time machine.

Larraín has always been fascinated by the spectacle of delusion. *Tony Manero* is named not for its protagonist, a sociopath, but rather for his idol, John Travolta's character in *Saturday Night Fever*. In Larraín's film, Santiago is a

Stygian labyrinth haunted by the memory of *los desaparecidos*, those disappeared by the junta—as well as by an unsmiling madman with fanatical dreams of disco glory. Raúl Peralta (played with frightening conviction by the avant-garde stage director Alfredo Castro) goes to screenings of *Saturday Night Fever* as if attending Sunday mass, enthralled by the movie's vision of the American dream and intent on memorizing Travolta's lines for a production of *Saturday Night Fever* he's staging with an inexplicably adoring cult of losers in a grungy Santiago cantina.

Shot on 16-millimeter film, *Tony Manero* has a purposefully murky look and a frantic pace appropriate to its ferretlike protagonist, whom Larraín's camera shadows as he darts through the city's empty alleys and vacant lots.

Peralta is an affectless man oblivious to the curfews and tribunals of Pinochet's police state and to the ineffectual subversive activities carried out by those around him. He stops at nothing, least of all murder, to fulfill his dream of becoming Chile's reigning Tony Manero impersonator, bludgeoning an old lady in order to appropriate her color TV, defecating on a rival Manero's white suit, and throwing a violent tantrum when he discovers that the theater he frequents has switched out his sacred *Saturday Night Fever* for *Grease*. (One of several signifiers of dictatorship in the film: these two Travolta vehicles were the only American movies the regime's censors permitted to be shown in Chile.)

Tony Manero suggests that lawless police states enable all manner of free-lance killers. The movie's violent, "Stayin' Alive"—obsessed zombie struck some critics as a miniature Pinochet, reproducing the brutality of the regime in his willingness to steal, exploit, betray, and kill in the service of an American-produced fantasy. At the same time, the movie is an attempt to reanimate a repressed period. Larraín has noted his difficulty depicting the Santiago of the 1970s: "Hardly anybody remembers how it was, which is very sad: there's nothing worse than indifference to history." Contemporary Santiago is "a city of steel and glass that advances by destroying and building over its past."

The title *Post Mortem* suggests a similar attempt at exhumation, in this case of modern Chile's primal trauma. According to Larraín, the inspiration for the film came from the story of the assistant coroner who performed the autopsy on Allende. The movie's opening shot has a tank rumbling over a Santiago street filled with detritus—mopping up after the coup. The blank-faced, lank-haired protagonist, Mario Cornejo (named for the real-life coroner and played, once more, by Alfredo Castro), is a gray "functionary" in the city morgue who pays court to an over-the-hill nightclub dancer named Nancy Puelma (Larraín's wife, Antonia Zegers). Both equally self-absorbed and convinced of Nancy's star power, the two carry on largely indifferent to the political crisis unfolding around them—this despite the fact that Nancy, who

lives with her father and brother, is surrounded by left-wing activists. Bored by the politicals meeting in her house, she drops in on Mario, her neighbor, to initiate one of the most desultory affairs in the history of movies. Mid-film, Larraín flashes forward to the last time the couple will meet—in the morgue—as if to suggest that they are already dead.

The implication, as Jonathan Romney wrote in the British magazine *Sight & Sound*, is that, unlike these *morts vivants*, "only those who resisted and were slaughtered had a true claim to be alive." Mario emerges on the morning of the coup to find empty streets and smashed cars. His workplace is a grotesque, bureaucratic nightmare, occupied by soldiers and overflowing with bodies, some still alive. Mario is drafted to document the Allende autopsy that, in one of the movie's most harrowing scenes, his colleagues are too distraught to perform. When Mario finds Nancy again, he is, in his way, a member of the newly installed fascist regime; she, in hers, is a political fugitive headed for the grave.

Ten years after the period depicted in *Tony Manero* and exactly fifteen years after the coup, Chile staged its own cinematic event. Pinochet, confident of his hold on power, and with a certain amount of prodding from the Reagan Administration, agreed to hold a plebiscite, giving Chileans the option to vote yes to keep him in power for another eight years or no to opt for an election that would determine his successor.

Pinochet assumed it would be an easy victory until the numerous opposition parties unexpectedly joined forces. Their symbol was the rainbow. The Coalition of Parties for NO saw its main disadvantage as a lack of access to Chile's strictly controlled national television, which the regime had begun using months in advance of the plebiscite to broadcast propaganda. According to the political scientist Gwynn Thomas, who devotes considerable space to the subject in her *Contesting Legitimacy in Chile*, the regime aired an average of thirty spot ads each day from January to August 1988 (and at the same time made nearly 1,800 political arrests). Their slogan was "Democracy, YES."

Sportingly, it was agreed that, during the designated twenty-seven-day campaign period in September 1988, both sides would receive equal airtime on TV in the form of fifteen-minute broadcasts, or *franjás*, shown consecutively in alternating order. The *franjás* were deliberately scheduled outside prime time—late at night on weekdays and at noon on weekends. There was no real parity, in that the regime maintained its prime-time propaganda blitz, but, according to Thomas, this actually proved to Pinochet's disadvantage. Viewers had long become accustomed to tuning out the general's agitprop. The NO broadcasts were, by contrast, a novelty.

The *franjás* soon became the most popular regular programming on Chilean TV, in part because viewers were fascinated by the dialogue between the two campaigns. The forces of NO were compelled to submit their *franjás* thirty-six hours in advance of broadcast, thus allowing the YES campaign to prepare rebuttals. But, as noted by the economist David E. Hojman, author of a scholarly study of the *franja* war, this advantage was often dissipated by YES's maladroit copying of NO's style, a practice that only served to highlight the NO campaign's originality.

While some NO *franjás* directly addressed the suffering brought about by the dictatorship, they generally (and programmatically) eschewed a downbeat approach. Their attitude was as lighthearted, inclusive, and reassuring as commercial television itself. The NO campaign recruited Patricio Bañados, a beloved TV newsmen who had resigned after the coup in protest of the regime's censorship, to host their *franjás*; they also adopted the slogan "Chile, happiness is coming," delivered each night in a catchy anthem with a clap-friendly rock beat. In short, NO successfully packaged itself as a product and turned the plebiscite into a ratings war. Larraín, then twelve and, like his parents, "one of those millions of people supporting the YES on the streets," has compared the carnival atmosphere surrounding the plebiscite with that of the World Cup.

Visually, *No* is daringly cruddy. Using a thirty-year-old U-matic camera, Larraín re-creates the light-smear-

low-definition look of a 1980s video-cassette while seamlessly incorporating all manner of archival footage. (This sleight of hand extends to several historical figures—notably Bañados, who appears as a grand old man and magically transforms into his younger self when seen on TV.) *No* also incorporates a number of the original *franjitas*. The viewer is reminded of Marshall McLuhan's assertion that "historians and archeologists will one day discover that the ads of our times are the richest and most faithful daily reflections that any society ever made of its entire range of activities." *No* has its nominal origins in a one-man play by Antonio Skármeta (another exile), and in essence it is, as one character in the film says of the YES ads, "a copy of the copy of the copy."

Alfredo Castro appears once again as the embodiment of the dictatorship, in this case a smooth and cynical advertising mogul named Lucho Guzmán. Here, however, Castro's character is overshadowed by a younger figure—his protégé René Saavedra, played by the puppylike Gael García Bernal. The movie opens with the two admen pitching a TV campaign to the makers of Free cola, Chile's short-lived alternative to Coke and Pepsi. "Let's be honest," Saavedra murmurs as he hits the VCR remote. "Today Chile thinks of the future." The spot that unspools is all Pepsi Generation pixilation, featuring hysterically celebratory young people, a taste of pop ecstasy, and a mantra promising viewers that Free cola was "born for you" and is "unbound like you." The clients are uneasy; one is humorously bewildered by the presence of a mime in the frenzied montage. It's not clear whether they sign on to the campaign or buy Saavedra's explanation of its message ("If you're brave, you're free"), but it's clear that we are witnessing the birth of a notion. A middle-aged representative of the NO parties soon shows up to recruit Saavedra to mastermind their advertising strategy.


Saavedra's father was a victim of the regime, his estranged wife (played by Antonia Zegers) is an unreconciled Pinochet opponent who believes the plebiscite to be a fraud, and he himself grew up an exile in Mexico. Still, he is essentially apolitical, at least at first.

He signs on as a NO consultant, it would seem, mostly for the chance to vindicate his Free cola theories by applying them to the plebiscite. The initial NO ad is a grim drumbeat of statistics—200,000 exiled, 2,110 executed, 1,248 disappeared—scored to tragic music. Asked to give his thoughts, Saavedra suggests they try something "nicer."

The YES men have long since seized the term "democracy"; Saavedra instead sets out to sell the concept of "happiness." This game plan occasions considerable sectarian discussion. Saavedra has to convince his new, mainly older comrades, most of whom, he's surprised to learn, regard the plebiscite as a teachable moment and have little expectation of winning, that glorifying happiness is not inherently disrespectful to the dictatorship's victims. He commissions a jingle and rounds up his usual performers, producing a prototype that, upbeat and inane, verges on self-parody—another Free-cola montage, complete with mime, that promises the nation imminent joy.

Not everyone is thrilled. Invoking the martyrs of '73, a furious, granite-faced leftist points out that Saavedra is proposing "a campaign to silence what has really happened." True enough; Larraín provides no rebuttal. Cursing those who remain, the leftist walks out of the meeting, the movie, and Chilean history. This scene is crucial. *No* may seem like a film made in the spirit of such high-minded Carter-era Hollywood productions as *All the President's Men*, *The China Syndrome*, and *Norma Rae*, but unlike those proudly liberal polemics, it embodies its own critique. Saavedra's strategy is something like television for its own sake—he is using "liberation marketing" to advertise the freedom of the liberated market.


Guzmán, Saavedra's boss, is the only one who understands how thoroughly YES is losing the campaign, and, after the initial hard-line attempt to sell Pinochet as the father of the nation fails (one *franja* includes the unfortunate image of a NO-identified steamroller poised to pancake a toddler), he is given the YES account. Guzmán immediately pulls the general and the military from his ads and tries, with varying degrees of success, to respond directly to the NO *franjitas*;



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at the same time, he encourages the authorities to open a second front by directly intimidating Saavedra (who is now fully committed to the cause). For much of the movie, Saavedra pings between his suavely menacing right-wing boss and those doctrinaire compañeros whose idea of effective rabble-rousing is to have half a dozen bereaved widows and mothers perform a traditional Chilean folk dance.

Like the *franj*as themselves, *No* is a contest. When a NO spot is censored, the campaign responds the next night with man-on-the-street interviews decrying censorship. When the YES spots turn threatening, Saavedra underscores their unpleasantness by increasing his own work's jocular amiability. The word "no" becomes a female rejection of boorish macho, used by a wife to stave off her husband's advances until he too agrees to vote no; Pinochet appears as a ridiculous, fusty relic about to be swept away by the tide of joy. For NO's grand-finale *franja*, a gaggle of Hollywood stars (Jane Fonda, Christopher Reeve, and Richard Dreyfuss) descend from heaven to make their endorsements. As much fun as Larraín has with this footage, he has even more quoting a YES *franja* featuring the fire-and-brimstone televangelist Jimmy Swaggart.

No's outcome is a matter of historical record. If contemporary news reports are any indication, the forces of NO were confident of victory weeks before the actual vote, as public-opinion polls predicted crushing defeat for Pinochet. Still, Larraín has contrived a suspenseful movie replete with last-minute dirty tricks and a foiled attempt (as actually happened) to reimpose martial law. Initially dazed when the authorities concede, Saavedra melts into the celebratory crowd, unnoticed and unthanked, clutching his young son. (Thus the filmmaker inscribes himself in the film, albeit on the winning side of history.)

No is nothing if not a tribute to the power of positive image-making. It's worth remembering that the plebiscite took place during one of the most negative presidential campaigns in recent American history. Under the tutelage of Roger Ailes and Lee Atwater, George

H. W. Bush ran in support of the flag and the pledge of allegiance, against the "L word," the ACLU, and the furloughed convict Willie Horton—an issueless race that for Kathleen Hall Jamieson, an analyst of political advertising, provided conclusive "evidence that campaign messages do matter." At the same time, televised glasnost contributed mightily (if inadvertently) to the fall of Soviet communism.

In his final *franja*, Patricio Bañados (who at least once extolled the NO productions as superior television to those of YES and suggested this provided reason enough to vote against Pinochet) told the audience that "a triumph for NO is a triumph for all, even for YES supporters." The Chilean premiere of *No* last summer was attended by three former presidents: Patricio Aylwin, the Christian Democrat who succeeded Pinochet; Eduardo Frei, Aylwin's Christian Democrat successor, the son of a pre-Allende president; and Ricardo Lagos, the socialist who succeeded Frei. Missing was Chile's current, right-wing president, Sebastián Piñera, a onetime television and credit card magnate who spent millions on his campaign and who maintains that he, too, voted no back in 1988.

Did television really overthrow Pinochet? In their 1991 history of the regime, pointedly titled *A Nation of Enemies*, Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela credit American pressure, a re-energized network of activists, a number of eloquent opposition spokesmen, and Pinochet's considerable overconfidence, as well as the nightly *franj*as, with the result of the plebiscite. But certainly YES lost the narrative. The dictatorship was unable to convincingly frame the plebiscite as a crusade against those supposedly advocating a return to the internecine strife of 1973, while NO successfully presented itself as genuinely forward-looking and committed to preserving the Pinochet regime's economic accomplishments—that is, without Pinochet.

Larraín's ending has the heroic ad-man returning to work—introduced by his proud boss to a new set of clients as the genius behind the NO campaign. "Today," Saavedra tells them, as he did the cola manufacturers, "Chile thinks about its future": consumer capitalism forever. ■

PUZZLE

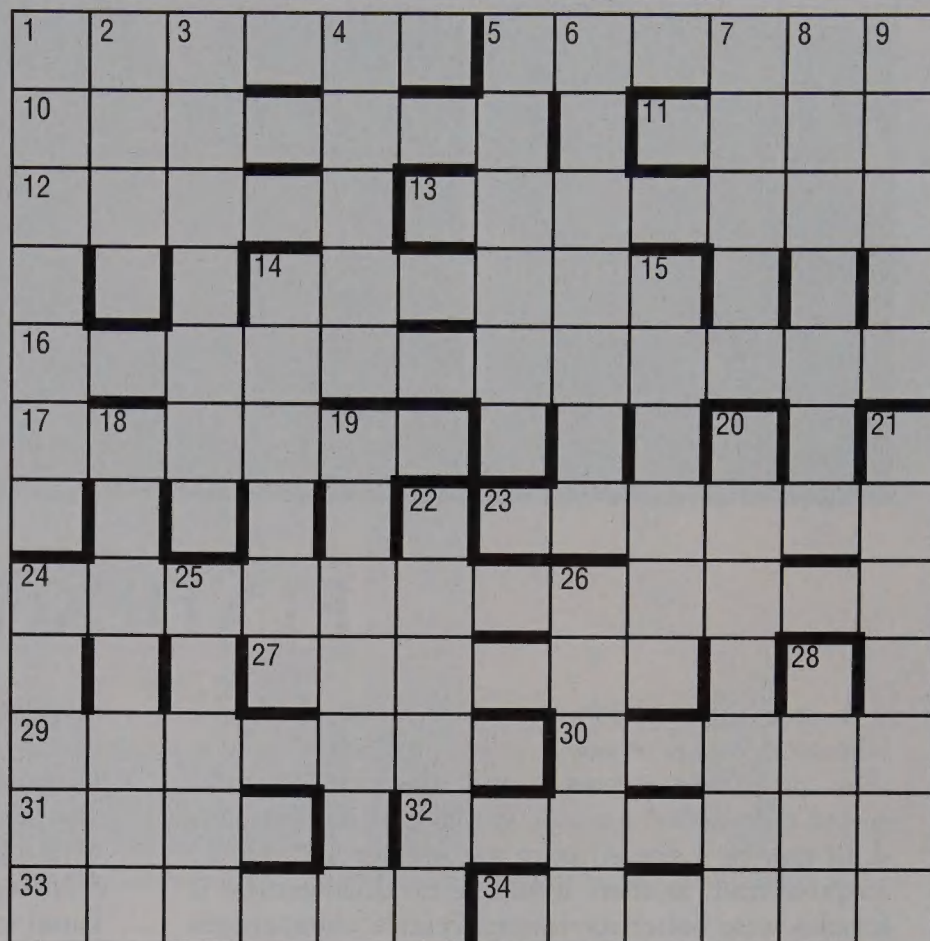
SIXES AND SEVENS

By Richard E. Maltby Jr.

(with acknowledgments to Zander of The Listener)

The clues to words of six and seven letters in length are grouped separately. Solvers must determine their positions in the diagram.

Clue answers include one proper noun and one variant spelling. As always, mental re-punctuation of a clue is the key to its solution. The solution to last month's puzzle appears on page 57.



ACROSS

11. Architectural feature due me? That's what it says! (4)
12. Run up from terminal, perhaps, able to go missing (5)
16. Darlings heard by orators in hats (12)
24. Peculiar quality sailor held in place—this shows restraint (12)
30. Headgear with the front cut off for the city (5)
31. Animal from pound running after one (4)

DOWN

2. Sounds like electees stay here! (4)
4. Look! The gentleman's upset an animal (5)
7. Ring in the nose and a very tight collar (5)
9. Looks around closer to stoop, and passes through (5)
24. Head caught by the ears where a row takes place (5)
25. Kind of patrol preconceived to some extent (5)
26. Even contributors to matchup, then, become critical (5)
28. First requirement for Pullman porter: being really fair (4)

SIX-LETTER WORDS

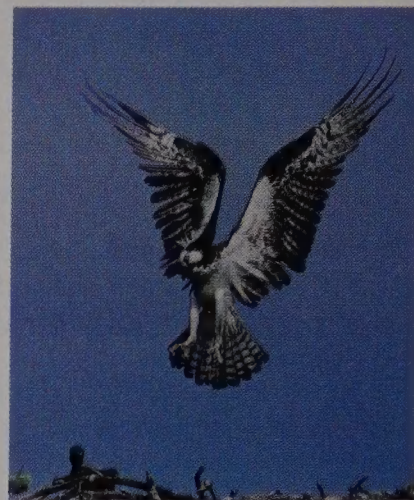
- a) Save a soul? Think again!
- b) Number participating in test in three parts
- c) One involved in cable network makes big cuts (hyphenated)
- d) Limits the development of film tricks
- e) Small boat, something you can get from drawers

- f) Habit-forming item endlessly allowed to be put on wuss?
- g) Topics for redesigning a study for a scientist
- h) Turner is displayed in galleries out front
- i) Recent title character, a child returning for grand things?
- j) A tonic mixer might get you this!
- k) Friend going over the edge to get key
- l) Found article during meal

SEVEN-LETTER WORDS

- a) Not many affected? Quite the opposite!
- b) Chopper met in action carries hurt
- c) A red insect fills in after getting left out of chili
- d) Obligated by law to cover a thousand dollars, but appealing
- e) Check on trade requiring, therefore, holding a degree from Wharton
- f) Spooky and kinda not like a container!
- g) Small creatures run around, take something much smaller
- h) Pastoral letter from Benedict, upper-class pain in the gut
- i) Eccentrics can produce rowdies' dowries
- j) To find the score? You betcha!
- k) One might be found in bed with a crazy person, rising around one after gym
- l) Hair pushed back on our entrance to Queen Elizabeth!

Contest Rules: Send completed diagram with name and address to "Sixes and Sevens," *Harper's Magazine*, 666 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. If you already subscribe to *Harper's*, please include a copy of your latest mailing label. Entries must be received by May 10. Senders of the first three correct solutions opened at random will receive one-year subscriptions to *Harper's Magazine* (limit one winner per household per year). Winners' names will be printed in the July issue. Winners of the March puzzle, "Title Search," are Brian Brock, Laveen, Ariz.; Tom O'Brien, Chicago; and Steve Simons, Stratham, N.H.



FINDINGS

A study of cuttlefish, deer mice, horses, humans, laboratory mice, meadow voles, pine voles, prairie voles, rats, rhesus macaques, and talas tucu-tucus suggested that males' superior spatial and navigational skills may be a side effect of testosterone and not an adaptive trait, as there would be no disadvantage if females were better navigators. Female chimpanzees are more aggressive and less apologetic in their communication with other female chimps. "To speak anthropomorphically," said the researcher who authored the study, "I can certainly see some parallels in my own life." Scientists proposed that male lions' skill at ambushing prey in dense vegetation was previously unknown because of scientists' fear of being ambushed by male lions in dense vegetation. Daisy, frankincense, mint, and myrtle, and possibly lime, were used to mummify Richard the Lionheart's heart. Richard III was not a psychopath. A newly translated Coptic text alleged Judas' kiss to have been necessitated by Jesus' ability to shape-shift. Rome's Catholic University of the Sacred Heart found that subjects with HIV poorly perceive fearfulness in others. Large horns cost rhinoceros beetles little.

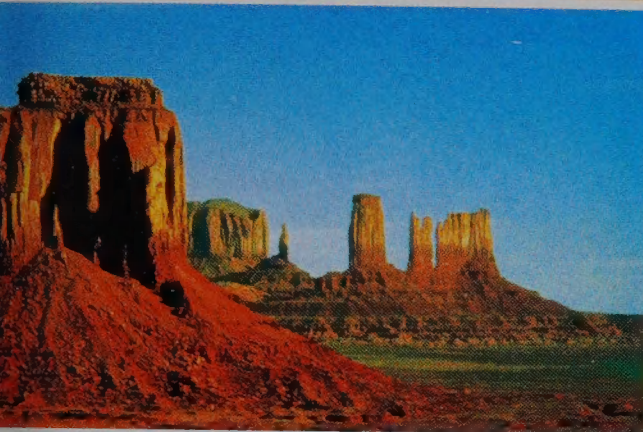
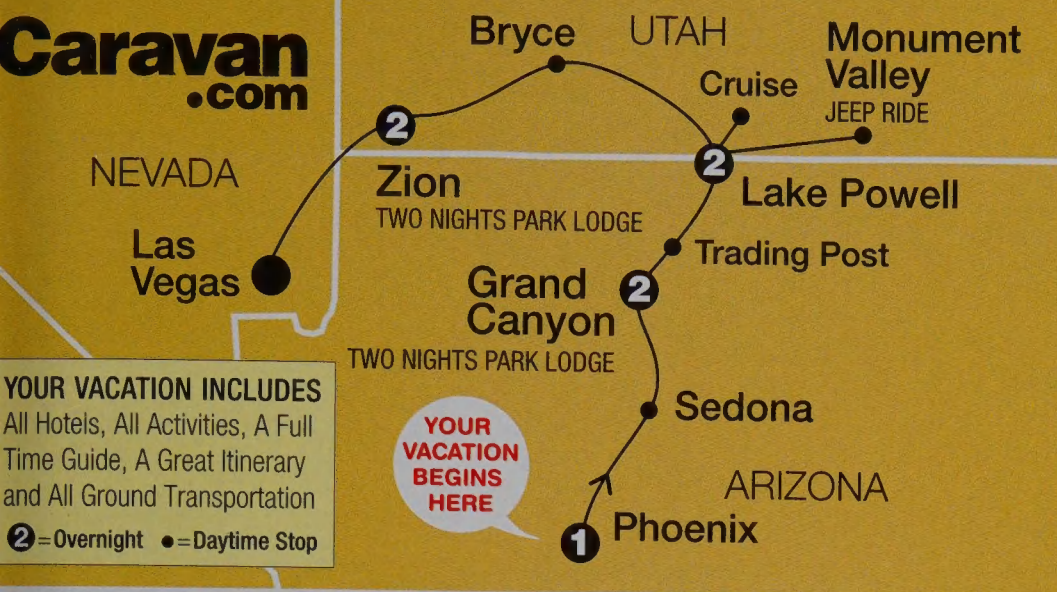
Scientists who installed electrodes in petunias found that flowers (which have innate negative polarity) discharge their potential upon visitation by positively charged bumblebees, thereby informing subsequent bee visitors of the "honest status of their precious nectar and pollen reserves." Sociable bees will leave warning pheromones for their conspecifics on flowers where scientists have attacked them with pincers. The reduced pheromonal signature of inbred male moths disinclines female moths to mate with them unless the females' antennae are first coated with nail polish, in which case color-coded fluorescent dust left by the

males' genitals will reveal the females to have mated equally with inbred and outbred males. Stingrays fed regularly by humans more frequently impregnate one another. Ship noise stresses crabs. Guinea pigs reduce whining among autistic children. Partner-Oriented Self-Regulation (POSR) in a grieving parent was found to increase the grief of both that parent and the other parent in the Netherlands. African Americans, the widowed, and those who wake to smoke in the night were found likelier to relight cigarettes. New brain cells appear during puberty to help with the complexities of adulthood.

The classical theory of crystal formation was salvaged, and it was determined that diamond-coated petri dishes are best for sperm and that the distribution of stars in young globular clusters defies gravity. NASA's *Curiosity* rover switched to safe mode after its files were corrupted, possibly by cosmic rays. A middle-aged couple was sought to take a trip to Mars. A smartphone in heliosynchronous orbit was issuing human screams. At the edge of the Atacama Desert, vampire bats were feeding on Humboldt penguin chicks. The diarrhea of young pigs was being treated with genetically modified goat milk, and British otters' penis bones were becoming less massive. Fewer than half as many humans as last year volunteered to help the common toad cross Gorley Road. Ergonomists suggested improvements to drone pilots' workstations in order to reduce the loss of aircraft and humans to operator error. A plan to divert all drug-war resources toward curbing the overprescription of antibiotics was proposed by the philosopher Jonny Anomaly. Dr. Adriaan Dokter of the University of Amsterdam observed the regular crepuscular ascent of common swifts to a height of 2.5 kilometers. ■

"Ruby-crowned Kinglet, July 11, 1951," "Vermilion Flycatcher, Arizona, May 1941," and "Osprey, Great Spruce Head Island, Maine, 1976," photographs by Eliot Porter, whose work was on view last month as part of Artist's Choice: Trisha Donnelly, at the Museum of Modern Art, in New York City. Artwork © 1990 Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas

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